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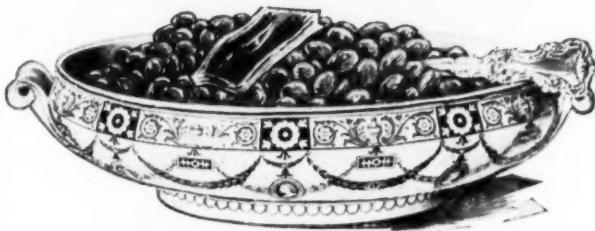
AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS



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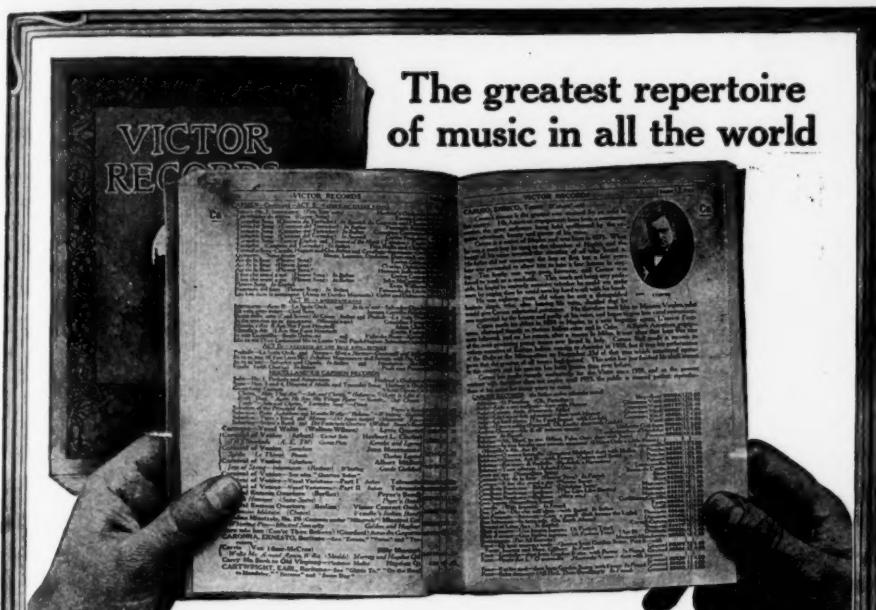
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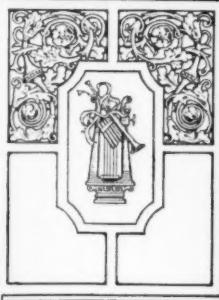
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AINSLEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. XXXII. No. 6

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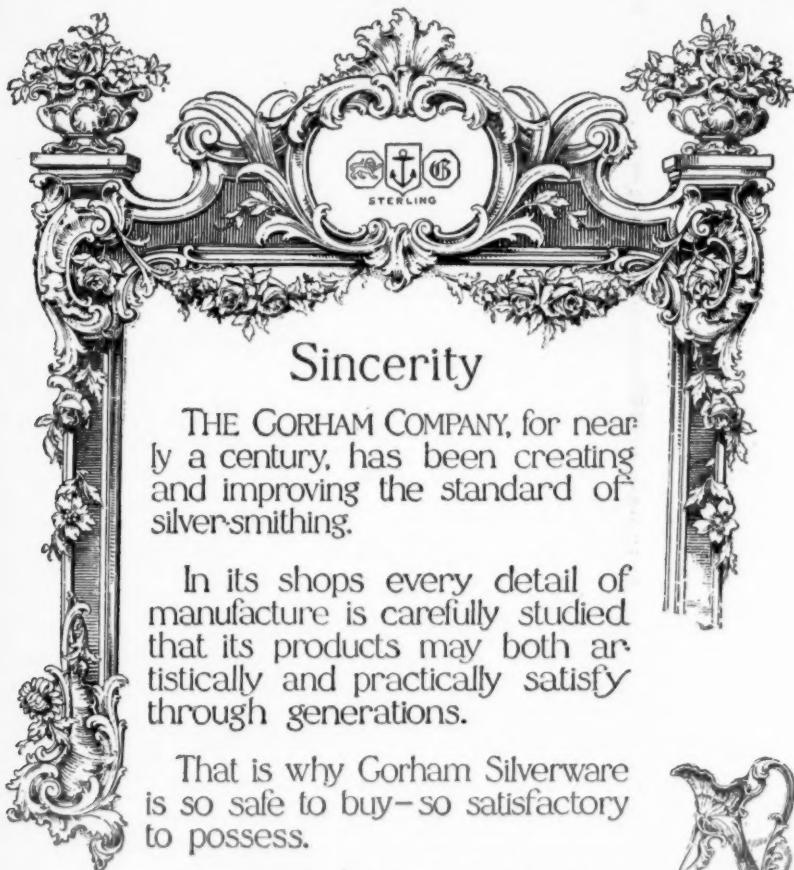
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. XXXII.

JANUARY, 1914.

No. 6.

SECRET STRINGS & KATE JORDAN

So it is, my dear
All such things touch secret strings
For heavy hearts to hear
So it is, my dear

—Rossetti

CHAPTER I.

THERE are insignificant streets on the left bank of the Seine that, though very poor, have a look of comfort—even some of those close to the reckless, out-at-elbows *Boul' Miche*—but this was not one of them. It was very narrow, very drab—a sad little street.

On a rainy day, such as this, in late November, it was at its worst. The line of big studio windows, bare and streaked, or hung with curious, dingy remnants as curtains, faced each other at close quarters, like flat, gray, hopeless faces. Its damp shops, where old clothes, fading vegetables, and every separate part of a chicken—even a neck—could be bought from a sou up, gave the impression of having a cold in the head and of being very miserable about it.

The showers of the raw autumn morning had been drumming since dawn upon the roof of Janet's studio. She had been trying to paint, with the sound of the chimney's groaning and the distracted sparrows' whimpering in

her ears. But—heavens!—it was a lonesome thing to begin work in the lean, unwarmed hours, without having had even a cup of coffee!

She threw down the brush, pushed her stained fingers through her loose, heaped-up red hair, and yawned in a gust of melancholy, slow tears gathering in her hollow, dark-blue eyes.

"Oh, little did my mother know,
The day she cradled me—"

She said this aloud in a whisper so sharp that it lingered on the room's emptiness. The old, tragic rhyme kept beating in her brain:

"Oh, little did my mother know—"

At this second breaking off, she turned in her chair sharply and fastened her eyes on the door. Her heart seemed to stop its beating for a second; in the next, its clamor filled her ears like a torrent. *Some one was outside the door!* Some one who would listen—and wait—give a cautious knock for her ears alone—then creep in with the silence of a snake—and face her.

She stood up, trembling, and gripped the top rail of her chair. He had come

back! It was just as if he were in touch with Satan and knew how desperate, how weak, failure and hunger had made her; how willingly she might now listen to what she had hated before. He had come back!

The knock brushed the panels, light as a ghost's—just as she had known it would. The door opened, closed in a flash and silently, and he was there against it, his back to it, his eyes on hers.

He was a man of about thirty or a little less; slender, fair-haired, with dark-brown eyes that smiled lazily. His chin was cleft; his mouth, though firm and large, was as curved as a beautiful woman's; his intensely white teeth projected over the lower lip a little, just enough to give a daintily greedy, faun-like touch to the face. He was fashionably and exquisitely dressed, in spite of the rain and the early morning, so it was evident that he had not walked down the sad little street to her door.

In a village, or in a poor neighborhood, he would have passed as a fine gentleman. Among people of breeding, there would always have been some who doubted him. He was, in fact, a counterfeit, but a superb one.

"Good morning. Are you glad to see me?" he asked.

Janet's white face contorted in a ghastly smile.

"You forgot to lock the door this time. Isn't there any one after you?" she asked with a distinctness that was insulting.

"Oh, dear no!" he said, sauntered to one of the chairs, flicked at it with a huge cambric handkerchief, settled himself, crossed his knees, and fondled his cane as it lay across them horizontally. "Dear me, no!"

"What do you want?"

"What a question from a wife!"

Her face grew convulsed at the word. She tried to speak, but staggered awkwardly; indeed, she would have slipped in weakness to her knees had he not been alert to catch her. He placed her in a chair and stood over her.

"Aren't you tired of the honest busi-

ness yet? You haven't any fit tools to work with, my dear."

He laughed. The sneering sound was not without pity as he placed his arms akimbo and stared down at her. She had turned from him, her face pressed closely upon her old, paint-stained sleeve on the back of the chair.

"You're like so many women who begin as fine ladies, and who, when the money pinch comes, find themselves stranded. You can't earn money honestly—you don't know anything. As for talent—this painting—why, you haven't any. I'm brutal—but I've got to be. Your rent is overdue, and out you go even from this rookery in two days. You're hungry at this very minute—so hungry that you find it impossible to stand up while you pour your contempt on me. I've made it my business to find all this out. Don't paint any more. Old Moraud can't afford to buy any more of these daubs from you."

At the last phrase, she lifted her sick face.

"Old Moraud can't afford—" she stammered. "Why, he bought them for dealers he knew—"

"Poor, little thing!" The man's long, shadowy eyes brightened in mockery. "That's what he told you. He was so sorry for you that he bought them, poor as he is, himself. His cupboard is full of your useless canvases, my dear. If you don't believe me, the first time you see him cross the street to buy a neck of chicken, just sneak down to his studio, push past old Margot, and investigate. Then you'll know that I'm talking truth."

"Oh!" she moaned, and her face grew hard, a gray pallor creeping over it. "Oh, have I come to that?"

She sat staring at the walls, where, between huge charcoal sketches, purple strains from dampness gleamed like old wounds.

"Just that," he assured her, in a voice whose soft yet piercing quality was one of his greatest charms as it had been one of his most important business assets. "Now will you listen?"

She did not shudder when he put his

hand on her shoulder. She did not even evade the touch. He, who was used to noticing every slightest thing and to analyzing its meaning, noticed that.

"I don't want you to think that I'm just an ordinary thief," he said, very softly, yet with decision. "I'm not. Far from it. But there are some people whom to rob is not only just, but *joy!* Why should they have so much—these cold-blooded worms? Where did they, or their progenitors, get it all? If handed down to them, it came more than half the time through some great-grandfather who played spy or cheat in some big political game, for a price; or because some great-grandmother happened to take the fancy of a king who could enrich and coronet her even though she came out of the slums. And now that they have it, what do they do with it? Any good? Anything kind? Quite the contrary! Hard as stone, they live the lives of gobbling, gluttonous pigs. I rob them when I can. That's my creed."

He tapped her shoulder lightly. Though she did not look at him, he saw that she was listening.

"The time has come, my dear, when you can help me," he went on, so close to her ear that she felt his breath upon it. "I could get some other woman, but you, who are so poor, who at twenty-four look bloodless and haggard from starvation—I'm giving you the chance. Will you take it?"

There was a long pause. He saw her hands double up and grow blue at the knuckles, her lashes retreat under the pressure from her fiercely shut lids. She was thinking.

What choice is there for a woman between the Seine, or public charity, or the sale of herself at a poor price, or a helping hand like his over the sharp stones of life, though the hand be the *left* one and the road lead through slime and danger before safety is reached? Not many would choose the river; or the streets; or the hospital for vagrants. He was not surprised at the answer that came in a dull and bitter tone:

"Who are the people? And what do you want me to do?"

"Ah!" he said, and it was a trailing sound of content and approbation.

He lighted a thin, brown cigarette, its fragrance so heady in her brain, that she unconsciously let herself drift upon it as a victim does upon the power of a drug. The story to which she listened was this:

In the haunts where he passed his secretive existence—known either by his own name of Arthur Newell, a native of San Francisco, or by various aliases—he had come upon a situation that meant *money!* One of his comrades, a man named Langstreet, had but lately returned from orchid hunting in South America. There he had known a man who had been a mystery, who had died in the wilds and had been buried in the tangle of the sickly, tropical forests. All except this one comrade of Newell's had known the man as Pierre Duval, a Frenchman of a bourgeois family. To Langstreet, who had befriended him, he had confided the truth about himself, had given him papers, letters, and so forth, to prove it, and had asked him to make known his fate to his family. This had been Langstreet's story.

And what was this family? One of the richest in France—an elder brother of the dead man's, and his wife, worth fully twenty million francs. They were the Comte and Comtesse Lamballeu.

On investigation, it had been found that the count was a kindly, churchly, stupid man, with a place in his heart for the memory of his scapegrace brother who had died so far away. The wife was an elderly, fashionable, utterly cynical butterfly, who, on her personal luxuries alone, spent a fortune every year. Her collection of jewels might awaken the wonder and envy of a rajah. After the word "jewels" had passed his lips, Newell settled more unctuously to the tale.

"These jewels are what I'm after. I tell you that frankly. Not all of them—just one brooch—but in that there are six pigeon-blood rubies. It is worth at least three hundred thousand francs. Now, you will ask: 'Where do I come

in? What have *I* to do with this?" What have *you* to do with this? I'll tell you: Langstreet is not equal to the work; he's sick; he's lost his nerve. He passed the whole story on to me. I know every detail of the life he and Pierre Duval—or rather Pierre Lamballieu—spent together; I have all the dead man's papers. In fact—"

She looked up to see a smile of satanic subtlety and triumph creep over his poetic, blond face and expand in his brown eyes.

"In fact, I am to be Robert Langstreet. Now you begin to understand?"

She nodded almost imperceptibly, and waited. Arthur stood up, and as he smoked, began to pace airily between the old chairs and the easel with its unfinished daub.

"I went two weeks ago to the Château des Mauves. Pretty name—Château of The Gulls; it suggests the sea. It is on great rocks where the Bay of Biscay melts into the ocean, not far from charming, ancient Nantes. You see that, though eying it from a business standpoint, its beauty impressed me most deeply. Well—the count and countess were visiting. I could learn no more than that. But I thought it advisable to tell my story to the count's secretary, who was there, who communicated with his master, and arranged for an interview. The day is set. I go to visit the Comte and Comtesse Lamballieu the day after to-morrow. That's why I came to you—to ask you if you will join me in this pretty bit of business, or to say good-by. For, after it, I shall leave France."

Janet looked up and eyed him straightly. Even what life had shown in her face before had now gone from it.

"I see that I am to help you rob the countess. I get that clearly. But I fail to see where I can possibly come in."

"All I ask is: Are you willing?"

Her answer came before he expected it, and quite without hesitation.

"Oh, I made up my mind to that," she said, in a voice that made him think of a shut-in torrent forcing its way drop by drop through some stubborn obstruc-

tion, "when you told me of poor old Moraud buying my pictures from charity. A woman who comes to that ought to—die. If she's too cowardly to make away with herself, then, as she must be a buzzard of some sort, she might better get her fill from the rich than from those who are almost as destitute as herself."

Arthur threw his arm about her. Even though she flung him off with a cry of distaste, he stood laughing gayly, bent over before her.

"Bravo, *chérie*! That's the cry for—life! Fate says that you need not live—that you cannot! But you say that you *must*, and you *will*! If you can't by fair means—then there's nothing else"—he craned his head toward her, speaking in the very faintest, smallest whisper—"but to relieve the already over-jeweled countess of just one little crimson bauble."

An hour later, Arthur Newell went down the bare, damp stairways, over the cobbled courtyard, spotted in sunken places with pools, and into the sad little street where his taxicab ticked its life lavishly away.

"Henri's!" he said, as he stepped in. There was a faint pinkness in his white, boyish face. He felt that after his master stroke of the morning he deserved the most delicious *déjeuner* that Henri's menu would supply.

Ten minutes after his departure, Janet came down the same stairs, money in the little bag that she clutched hard. She, too, crossed the cobbled courtyard, and stepped into the sad little street. Her step was as determined as her face was rigid. She entered a small restaurant at the corner. Her voice trembled as she ordered an omelet, a salad, and a pot of *café au lait*. It would be her first meal in almost four days.

CHAPTER II.

"As I told you, I found them easy." These were the first words of Arthur's first letter from the Château of The Gulls. "The countess was most grateful at my being interested in getting her a high-class companion. All that the

secretary had told me was true. She wants a woman to be with her constantly, unless she is surrounded with friends. She is terribly nervous—they have suffered so from attempts to get at her jewels! Once, only a few months ago, when her motor was carrying her to Paris, she was almost kidnaped. That's why she has determined to have a close companion, and, of course, she wants a lady, one that she can make a friend of.

"You may wonder that under these circumstances I am keen to undertake this job. *Chérie*—how good it is to call you that again, to be friends with you once more!—the danger only makes the idea more fascinating. To pull off this deal, *in their very teeth*, in the face of the fact that they are primed with the terror of being robbed, has the charm that a tight rope at a dangerous height has for a schoolboy who is playing hooky.

"They have 'fallen for me,' as so many have! I say this with all modesty. I really believe that the hard-eyed, heartless old countess is more than half in love with me. Neither she nor the count sees any one else—they have gone into a sort of seclusion at the château, their neighbors supposing them still abroad. When they go out motoring, it is with blinds down, only the secretary showing. Poor, overrich society puppets! Their possessions are as much of a load to them as his hump is to a cripple. Well—we are to relieve them of a small portion of their overplus.

"Now, for exact directions: You are *Janet Eustis*. The references on the gold-coronet paper, exquisitely forged by me, I want you to study well, and get yourself accustomed to talking of Lady Gordon Heskett and the others. By the accompanying papers, you will learn all about their habits, so you can talk familiarly of these habits as observed during your supposed service with them. The three people whom I am using in this manner are far away at the present moment—in Egypt, in China, and cruising about the South Seas—so there's not the least danger of

their being approached for a personal verification of their references.

"I will not go to the station to meet you—that would look unnecessarily attentive. But as soon as possible afterward I will have a talk alone with you. Unless I change this in a later communication, take a walk in the Italian garden just before dinner, on the night you arrive. If you can't manage to come alone, turn back. If alone, cross to the small marble bridge over the sunken corner. Stand on the bridge and look up at the sky. Meanwhile, I will be below, hidden by the bushes, and can hear your lightest whisper, as you also can hear mine. But we must be seen together as little as possible.

"A last word: I knew you in San Francisco, stumbled upon you only the other day in London, and, hearing that you were in need of a position, suggested you to my new acquaintances. We are old friends, yet—from having been separated by my long craze for orchid hunting—have seen little of each other of late years.

"Come, and be glad of this chance to squeeze a little from these overfed pigs! How you will hate madame la comtesse! I am posting this miles from 'The Gulls,' after a smart afternoon's ride that I have thoroughly enjoyed. You notice that I have kept your Christian name—I always do when it's possible. I think it makes an affair go more smoothly. Au revoir, Janet Eustis."

Janet looked around the studio, bare, of a sickly dampness, and very cold. It was soon to be a part of her past, just as the empty easel, rented to the next comer, was to be of the past. The thought of the old artist belowstairs who from pity had pretended to purchase her canvases for a customer had such exquisitely pointed bitterness that it formed a whip whose stinging strokes sent her on, blind, stumbling, but defiant.

She had made a failure of marriage, of art. Her struggles to live honestly had been in vain. Well, she had made her choice. If taking a little from these

mortals, isolated above ordinary human anxiety and suffering, were crime, then she would be a criminal. Just this once. That is what she told herself over and over:

"Just this once!"

She was of granite hardness, not a quiver of hesitation visiting her heart, which had been strained too severely. Yet—she had not looked into the mirror after the day upon which she had made her decision. She could not afford to have such eyes stare back at her—for, though desperate and angry, they had somehow stolen a wistful, anxious wonder that had been in her mother's, and that dug and dug into her heart like a spade into clay.

CHAPTER III.

At about four o'clock on the afternoon of a day that, though in early December, gleamed like a jewel of turquoise and amethyst, Janet alighted at the station nearest to the château. She looked the perfect ideal of a great lady's companion. The artistic carelessness of hair and dress was gone. She was as sleek as a serpent in her plain black charmeuse gown with its pelisselike coat. Her red hair had been brushed into the smoothest of coils and fastened under each ear. Her hat was small, simple, and dark; she carried a sedate-looking portmanteau.

A closed motor of dark crimson and silver waited at a little distance in the rounded curve. As she glanced at it, a fair, delicate-faced young man approached and lifted his hat.

"Mademoiselle Eustis? I am the secretary of monsieur le comte."

He assisted the footman to get her one trunk, Janet watching them from the scented interior of the car. For the first time in days, the strain on her nerves snapped, and, with a sort of rebellious delight, she relaxed against the cushions and faced her future. Comfort like this was the food of the spirit—it was a narcotic against the ills of life that must come to all. She recklessly resolved to have a little of it for

her own future use before the time came for her to leave this station behind her.

The secretary, coming to the open door, yet pausing outside, broke in upon her dream.

"There is another train from the Lyons direction in a few moments. It will be necessary for us to wait for that, mademoiselle. It brings monsieur le comte's nephew from Marseilles."

As the secretary seemed inclined to talk, Janet astutely decided to learn what she could of this nephew. Arthur might be glad to know. He had not mentioned him. Perhaps he had not counted upon his presence at the château. Janet speculated as to whether this would have any unfavorable effect upon the situation.

In answer to her adroit questions, she was told that the nephew was an explorer, just back from Egypt, and that he was coming to visit his relatives before going on to northwestern Canada, where he was interested in mines.

"His name is Hugh Maxwell," said the secretary.

"But that is an English or Scotch name," Janet commented.

The secretary smiled, relishing this bit of gossip at the motor's door with this excessively pretty companion of the countess.

"His mother, madame la comtesse's sister, was French; his father Scotch. I have never seen Mr. Maxwell, but he often sent very interesting letters from Egypt to the château."

The train from the south came in at this point, emitting the rapid, hysterical shrieks characteristic of French locomotives. Janet watched the secretary hurry down the platform, and as she saw him meet and lift his hat to a big, young man wrapped in a bulky ulster, she was irritated at the trembling that passed over her.

The news of this unexpected arrival dismayed her. Of course, the reason was that Arthur had evidently not expected it. Her nervousness made her realize what an apprentice she was in the ways of the underworld—how she

relied upon her husband as an experienced scoundrel to whom failure was practically impossible.

There were disklike stains on the whiteness of her delicate cheeks when the stranger appeared beside the secretary at the door of the car. The introduction took place. The big, young man with the sun-scorched skin and capable, brown hands bowed very low to her, stepped in, and took the seat facing her. The secretary sat beside him.

It was a curious ride to Janet. Hugh Maxwell was not more than usually attentive in his manner to her, and talked mostly to the secretary; yet there stole from him to her a sympathy as strong as it was mysterious. His look was from earnest, steady, gentle eyes, and seemed to touch her like sunlight; he had the illuminating smile of a man who was both honest and magnetic; he gave the impression of being boyish and yet experienced, of having tasted life to the dregs, yet of having gained from the draft a humanizing philosophy instead of bitterness.

She had come to do Arthur's degrading work buoyed up by the thought that the people whom she was to rob would be hateful to her, as were the rich *mon-daines* and *demi-mondaines* whom she had often watched in sumptuous cars on the Champs Elysées and along the Avenue des Acacias in the Bois, and whom, from the bottom of her aspiring, unsuccessful soul, she had envied, denounced, and hated. Such a feeling now would have been a helpful drug to a troublesome conscience. But to meet, at the very start, a man who somehow made real all the things in life that she had been taught from birth to believe worth the holding—honesty, simplicity, enthusiasm, a spirit of acceptance for whatever might befall—this loomed before her like an unexpected hurdle on what had promised to be a flat race.

She fought the feeling. Hugh saw her shrink into her corner and close her eyes. The lines about her mouth hardened. She was recalling the bare, fireless studio; the worthless daubs that she had made; her body fainting from hunger; the falling rain; and one picture

that had obsessed her—the Seine, with a white-faced cargo on its waves.

"I will go on!" she told herself. "What I have set out to do, I will do well. All that I need, to be a decent human being, living decently, is to have just enough money to buy the necessities demanded by my self-respect. Just one of the horde of jewels of this woman who has never known either suffering or temptation is all that I want—just one—and I mean to get it!"

A silence fell in the motor as the Château of The Gulls came into view. The beauty of its setting drove the dark thoughts from Janet's mind. It stood upon a high hill; an angled, gray, rambling house, with purple and ocher stains upon it from weather and time, with crimson vines cloaking it, and lancet-shaped windows blinking in the setting sun from among the leaves. One *felt* the sea beyond it because of the strong, salt breeze that bent the heads of the parallel lines of poplars running up the hill so that they looked like a plumed procession marching against storm; and also because of the gulls that wheeled in circles around the turrets, rising and falling with bleating, little cries not unlike the sounds made by inquiring sheep.

"Oh, the awakening smell of the sea!" Janet cried in rapture, half leaning from the car window. "And how lovely the château is! So lush, so peaceful! Why," she murmured to Hugh, "this is like feeling health after a fever! How happy the people ought to be who have such a home!"

"I see it as you do," Maxwell said, his English as perfect as her own. "To come to this from a year's digging in tombs under suns that beat like brass—well, you can fancy what I feel!"

Neither the count nor the countess appeared to greet the arrivals. Nor was Arthur to be seen. Janet had expected this. She was glad to follow a middle-aged maid to a room as big as a chapel, filled with Louis XI. furniture, and facing a view of the Italian garden. She surrendered to the luxury about her as to a spell. For the present, she would enjoy physical well-being and try to

forget that she was able to have this taste of it only through being a cheat.

The château had been fitted with every convenience and luxury. She refreshed herself in a bathroom of white onyx that shimmered like a pearl. When she came into the chamber again to dress for dinner, she found a log fire blazing, with tea and some triangles of thin toast waiting on a little table beside it, the maid the while putting away the clothes that she would not need and shaking out with an experienced carefulness those that she was to wear. When she was dressed for dinner in a gown of dead-white chiffon with twinkling little brilliants that made her look like fresh snow with starlight on it, she stepped to one of the windows.

"This is the Italian garden?" she asked the maid.

"*Oui, madame.*"

"It's so beautiful! I'll put on a scarf and stroll around for the air before dinner."

"That will be excellent to get away all memory of the train smoke, and improve the appetite," approved the woman, with a warming, personal interest, as she folded the swansdown cloak around Janet's shoulders. "You can go down the steps from this window." And she led the way to one near the head of the bed.

The garden was beautiful—so beautiful that the artist in Janet was thrilled to an almost painful ecstasy. She went along the winding ways among the fading flowers until she reached the bridge mentioned in Arthur's letter. As she approached it, she could make out the thick laurel bushes in the sunken part beneath it, and fancied that she saw there a glimmer of white also.

She bent over the balustrade, every nerve set.

"*Oh, quand l'amour meurt—*"

she began to sing by way of signal, her face lifted to the sky where gold and rose and apple-green and lilac were blended in colors to make one remember one's childhood ideal of heaven.

"Janet?" came the small, secretive whisper.

"Yes."

"Play up to the countess to-night! Make the most of every second. We've got to finish this job more quickly than I had counted on."

"You mean because of this nephew?"
"Yes—damn him!"

"You had not expected him when you made the start?"

"Never heard of him until this afternoon. I don't like having him about. The countess is a vain old ass, and I was making great headway with her. The count is a numskull, so easy to fool that it's like taking candy from a child. But I don't like the idea of this French-Scotch nephew."

"Then why not get out of it some way? You leave—and I'll follow as soon as I gracefully can."

"Not much! The sight of that woman's jewels has been like blood just out of the reach of a chained tiger. Wait till you see them! I fancy she'll be in full regalia to-night. I mean to separate her from some of them."

Janet looked about as if taking in the scene, then up at the sky again.

"From *some* of them?" she said, in a guarded, yet distinct and incensed, tone. "From *one* of them—the ruby brooch!"

"Oh, I'm miles from that idea," came the light, almost startling, voice. "I've grown ambitious. I mean to make a killing—with your help."

"I won't do it," she said clearly.

"You will."

"That was not our bargain."

"Bargains are subject to changes. We'll talk of this again. Look here—you came in the car with the nephew. What's he like?"

Janet was about to reply when a rustle at the end of the small bridge made her turn her head. Her blood seemed to thicken into solid ice in her veins as she saw Hugh coming toward her.

"Oh, Mr. Maxwell—you startled me!" she managed to say quickly and very loudly, turning to meet him.

He gave her a curious, puzzled look. She could feel that her lips had blanched.

"One would think that you'd seen a ghost," he said lightly.

"Let us walk back," she urged. "I think the loneliness and the cold have made me nervous. Such stillness as this after Paris!" As he turned and strolled by her side, she began to talk rapidly. "I counted over five hundred bellowing motors going past my studio window one day. And in those narrow streets of the Quartier they fairly slaughter people."

"Then you have been living in Paris?" he asked. "I was just speaking to the countess of you. She told me that you were direct from London."

"Well, I am," she hastily corrected, rage at her mistake, and a helpless sort of weakness coming over her at the same time. "I was visiting in Paris just before I—I—went to London."

"But you spoke of your studio."

"Oh, you rent studios there by the day or the hour almost, if you wish," she said, managing a laugh. "That's what the friends that I visited did."

"I'm very fond of the Quartier. Some of my happiest days were spent at the Beaux Arts, for I started life with the idea of being an architect. What street did you live on there?"

She had presence of mind now. Did he faintly suspect her? She looked him full in the eyes and told a lie:

"On the Rue du Cherche Midi." Then she added, with a gay, little laugh: "How bewitchingly the French name things—the 'Street of Finding Noon-day'—think of it! As also, this Château des Mauves—Château of The Gulls. Delightful!"

The foliated doorway into the château was reached. She was glad to pass under it, into the firelight of the huge, medieval hall. She was glad, too, to face the countess there, side by side with her husband, for the sight of them gave her back her defiance, her hardness, her resolution.

The woman was a made-up ruin, so covered with jewels that she seemed to be alight from the waist up. The husband looked simply a stupid, good-natured nonentity and gourmand. Janet

met the woman's sleepy, cold eyes, which looked at her through rings of purplish cosmetic, felt the chill, light touch of her fiery-ringed hand—and hated her with the hatred that one drowning would feel for an indifferent spectator.

"Where is that naughty Monsieur Langstreet?" the countess lisped in English. "He was helping my study of the English tongue to-day," she added, with a smirk and a long, coquettish glance at her husband, "by reading to me some of the poet Swinburne's early verses and very carefully explaining what I could not understand in the—the *love* idioms, you know." She laughed contentedly. "Ah, he is a very naughty man, sometimes, I think. But like an adorable child—so you cannot have the heart to slap him, to make him good. Ah—voilà! I speak of angels—and you see?"

Arthur was coming down the broad, shallow-stepped stairway. Janet made an inward note of his cleverness in not entering from the grounds. He had the appearance of having come direct from the hands of a valet. He was introduced to the nephew, and was pleasantly dignified. His meeting with her was perfect, with just the right touch of kindness tinged with formality to convey the impression that, while he had done a kind act in obtaining this position for her, his interest in her was not in the least personal.

CHAPTER IV.

A curious company sat down to dinner that night. From the dark, heavily wainscoted walls, rows of Lamballieus—most of them cavaliers in deep red and old blue velvets with ruffs and plumed hats, but one in a scaly armor that caught the firelight, and one in the flaming scarlet of a cardinal—looked down upon them.

Janet felt that Hugh Maxwell was the dominating note there—this man who had not been expected, against whom Arthur had not armored himself. While she hid outward sign of

it, she felt a hard terror and suspense begin to spread in her soul. She was very pale, and, although she talked agreeably when opportunity came to her, she was in reality watchful, like a bird poised for flight at the first hint of danger.

Not so Arthur. She could not but admire his charming ease and impudence. If he felt anything of her confusion, he hid it with a success that was fairly bewildering; and this although he was hard hit by the man whom she was beginning to dread in a hypnotized, quivering way that acknowledged his charm and his power equally.

The talk first glanced to the young brother of the count, Pierre, whom Arthur was supposed to have known in the closest intimacy during years of exile, in hours of great danger. To hear him ripple off the most comrades-like details of this man whom he had never seen, was a lesson in dissimulation that fairly dazzled Janet.

Even when Hugh began questioning him closely about orchid hunting, following this up by technical questions on the flower's growth and culture, he came out of the test with flying colors. His description of the Brazilian jungles, where the uncannily beautiful flowers grew in the branches of trees, sucking their brilliant, vampirelike life from them; his chatter of fevers and hunger; his shivers at the isolation and melancholy of the life—all were amazing. When it came to the culture of the flowers, he dazzled with a rapid fire of technical details.

Miltonia vexillaria! From a single growth of this specimen came one hundred and twenty-six flowers. Think of it! One of the most important items in orchid cultivation is to see that a much lower temperature is maintained at night than during the day—this because of the great changes from heat to cold in the climate natural to them. Oh, those tropical days when life steams out of you in the greasy broil—while in the chill night, with heat-opened pores, you shiver like an ague patient!"

"I suppose," Hugh surprised them all

by saying, "most of your finds in South America were of the *Eriopsis* family?"

"Ah," Arthur murmured, smiling brilliantly, "you know something of the subject?"

"I hunted orchids for two years, but mostly in Africa and the Strait Settlements."

A chill went over Janet's flesh at these words. Was Arthur prepared to cross swords with *one who knew?* Her clenched hands felt like stones. She watched the two men, who were looking at each other steadily.

Arthur bent forward over the table, and leaned his elbows upon it, his gaze that of an eager boy who finds another interested in his favorite game.

"Then we must have many talks!" he cried. "But this is *good!* How I have wanted to hear all about the *Disa grandiflora* of Africa! How my soul has longed to hunt there!"

The countess here recalled Arthur's attention to herself by tapping him on the arm with her longnion.

"Too much of orchids, *mon ami!*" she shrugged. "Give some attention now to mere human beings."

"To which one?" Arthur asked, with a daring, tender insinuation.

"To me—why not?"

And they fell into tête-à-tête chatter.

The count ate in a leisurely way, half blinking with sleep. He saw nothing. Hugh bent his gaze on Janet. It was such a quiet, yet deep and thoughtful, gaze that she felt a sorrowful uneasiness under it. A real twinge of hatred of herself flashed up and died down slowly.

"You," he said, and in the little word there was a startling touch of tenderness, "have some hobby, too?"

"My hobby," Janet answered daringly, "is a pervading desire to have done with struggle and money cares for a few years before I die!"

"That ought to be an easy wish to attain—particularly as there's a long stretch between now and that evil hour."

"You speak as rich men always speak," said Janet, and she allowed

some of her real distress to show in her face. "The fight for existence is terrible—for a woman."

"But doesn't one gain something precious from the fight?" he asked. "Doesn't the progress made over obstacles soften, broaden?"

She permitted herself an honestly bitter laugh.

"That is a popularly comfortable supposition!" she retorted. "It broadens by flattening! And you come out of the struggle softened, in a way, because you're half dead—enthusiasm gone, endurance weakened, expectancy and hope, which make the savor of the little things of life, quite obliterated."

Later, in the drawing-room, while the countess played on the harp—an accomplishment that showed off her bare arms, a really genuine beauty—Arthur stood beside Janet at the fire, and while they appeared to be listening to the music, spoke to her in whispers, without the slightest movement of the lips:

"We've got to put this through quickly and get out. I'm afraid of Maxwell."

She turned her head as if to pull her skirt from the fire, and sighed:

"Let's give it up."

"Are you willing to starve, then?" he asked furiously, while keeping his face like a mask.

"There may be something else—but not this—not this!"

"Don't be a fool! Come down early in the morning. Go up the first path to the left, and I'll tell you what to do. I need a night to think this over."

Janet's first night at The Gulls was one of exasperation and dreariness. She tossed in the big Louis XI. bed, visited by the horrors that come when one lies open-eyed in the darkness. The dawn had never been more welcome. As she saw the furniture emerge from the grayness and take vague form around her, she slipped from the all-pervading fear that had obsessed her the whole night through into a feeling of peace which, while it weighed like a drug, had cheer in it.

She and Arthur must win and get away from The Gulls quickly. She must not let the thought of this man's kind gaze and voice play havoc with her avowed determination. She must not like Hugh Maxwell. She must try to feel him an enemy—one of those successful ones who have an easy, self-satisfying philosophy for the disinherited of the world. She must obey Arthur; do what she had come to do; decamp; put hundreds of miles between her and The Gulls; settle down in some small town upon the proceeds from her part of the work, and then forget—forget.

She let her fancy lead her to the visualization of a hopeful future. She only wanted some drifting years of simplicity and peace—where no wolf would come continually to sniff under her closed door, no hunger pangs rend, no future threaten. Surely it was not much to demand! Surely Arthur was right when he said that a human being like the countess was proper food for the beak of the spoiler! To take a little of her *too much*—was not wrong. She must believe that. She must continue with a stout heart and a resolute will what she had begun.

Gradually a spurious peace visited her nerves, as she saw herself in fancy living in a small town—say, Dresden—where she would have a pretty, simple home; time for books, for music, to breathe the air, to make a few real friends—and all without the harrowing worry as to where the next day's meals were to come from.

She would not ask for love in her life ever again. She had played that game and lost utterly. All that she wanted was to put many miles between herself and Arthur, he pursuing his way, and she hers, until she drifted painlessly into the harbor of a protected old age.

She lay staring at the heavy cornice of the window opposite the bed. Her lips were set; her hands gripped the counterpane tensely. Since this was all that she asked, she was not demanding much of fate. And she would have it—yes, she would have it!

CHAPTER V.

This feeling was strong in her when she stepped from the bed and strolled to the window that looked upon the garden. She wanted to welcome this new day that was to bring her a hardier spirit, a more determined will, that was, in fact, to fashion her into a more determined wrongdoer. But when she gazed out into the increasing blueness of the east, she saw only one thing, and it halted her. Her hand caught at the heavy curtain. The look of life went out of her face, except that her eyes had the fear of the trapped.

Upon the small bridge, on the very spot where she had stood the previous evening, she saw an old priest. He was looking into the sunken corner where the thick laurel bushes had made Arthur's hiding place. Whether he was speaking to some one below, or investigating, she could not tell. But whatever his mission, she had an intuition of danger from it.

No one had mentioned a priest being in or near The Gulls. Who, then, was this man, abroad at dawn, alone, alert? As she watched him, he looked toward the house, but his face was hidden by his scoop-shaped hat. She got an impression of gray hair—that was all. He loitered only for a moment; then he descended the steps on the farther side, and the laurels closed over him.

With all restfulness gone, her mind in a confusion that bordered on panic, she began to make ready for breakfast. She would have to bathe without the cheerful wood blaze that the maid would later light on the deep hearth, and would be down hours ahead of time, but she dismissed hesitation. If any stranger were hidden at The Gulls, primed with suspicion, she must try to learn what she could of him and be ready with information when she met Arthur.

Twenty minutes later, a crimson-hooded cloak flung over her dark morning gown, she stepped from the big, foliated doorway into the garden, and hurried with a quick, defiant step to the little bridge.

The delicious air, rich with scents from the still-green hardier trees and from some flowers that were thriving in the soft, briny tang, stung her cheeks. To her right, she saw a few early gulls rising against the faintly tinged sky, their plaintive bleating having the effect of a hymn in the early silence. She had curious thoughts as she hurried on—that the peaceful world, the pungent earth, dark and moist with dew, the waters of the Bay of Biscay tumbling under the strengthening sunlight half a mile away, were all clean and sweet and true, and that she herself was a shadow moving among them, a cheat with a very frightened heart.

She reached the end of the bridge and bent over. She could see no one. Still determined, she descended the steps as the priest had done, and found herself among the laurels. The place was deserted. On the ground between the low trees, she saw a man's footprints; nothing else.

Following the path, she found herself facing a wing of the château, whose foundation here was deeper than in the other parts of the building. There was one, low, lancet-shaped window, and she tried to peer through it. But it had been made opaque by the incrusted dust of generations that covered it inside and out. There seemed only blackness beyond it. She had just noticed the man's footprint again near this window, when a very faint trill, like a bird's warbling, made her lift her head. She looked up into Arthur's face.

He was bending from the window above her, his fresh-skinned face eager, almost smiling, but with inquiry and anxiety back of the apparent unconcern.

"Good morning, Miss Eustis!"

As he spoke, he placed his finger cautiously to his lip, and made a motion with his hand that indicated a fear of what might be around the angle of the château.

"Good morning," she answered as lightly, but let him see the signal of trouble in her eyes.

"You are out very early. Isn't the ground soggy?"

"Very little. This garden is so enchanting. I see it from my windows, and I couldn't stay in."

"I've a good mind to join you. But, if I do, my appetite will disgrace the French idea of what is fitting for the first meal," he laughed. "I'll probably demand rashers of bacon or a cutlet with the usual *petit déjeuner* of coffee and *cressons*."

"Well, I imagine you can command that much, here, Mr. Langstreet," she answered. "You seem extremely popular."

"Am I? Oh, I like your saying that! I think I will come down and have you tell me more. But I say"—and he hung over, laughing like a boy—"if I come, are you game for a walk to the cliffs?"

"Yes, indeed. I'd like nothing better."

"Will you go without a hat?"

"I can pull up this hood." And she did so as she spoke.

"Little Red Riding Hood! I hope we won't meet the wolf!"

He laughed, disappeared, and soon came from under the big door on a boyish run.

"This is bully! Now for the cliffs, Miss Eustis! No ambling. I mean you to go at a gallop."

They made a gay dash down the avenue, Arthur speaking through set teeth as he went:

"Not a word until we're in the open!" He broke into a gay song:

"*Mais elle est si jolie—si jolie—*"

Ten minutes or so of rapid walking brought them to a sun-browned, rocky space, with nothing in sight but the gulls, and no sound but the sea.

"Arthur—" Janet began.

"Not even—here," he whispered. "The flat beach. Wait!"

Leaving the rocks, they were soon on a wide, silver-gleaming stretch of sand, against which the blue, white-flecked waves tumbled. For the moment, Janet forgot everything but that sight. Oh, that sea with the sun on it after the months in the shut-in studio, where she had fenced with starvation! Its liberty and defiance, and the clean

winds sweeping over it, typified the life that called to her, that she was huckstering her honor for! Oh, to sail away on it to the lands that were empty of all memories and—begin again!

She was facing it, her arms held out, the noise of the charging surf like the call of a heavy march throbbing on her brain, when the familiar scent of Arthur's brown caporal cigarettes mixed with the briny essence, and she heard his voice in her ear:

"You can talk now. We're away from those shelves of rocks that could easily hide a spy. Something got you out of bed hours ahead of time. What was it?"

She told of the priest; of his curious loitering on the bridge, his bending over the very spot where their interview had taken place.

"I had to come out. Who is he? What was he doing there? Arthur, are we safe? Oh, do you think we are safe?"

A succession of expressions had passed over his face at her words.

"Don't worry about the priest," he said. "He's down here at my order, waiting until we've pulled this off. He's Tony Ricet, disguised that way. He's with Jack Painter, who's got himself up as a peddler. They are at different lodging places in Nantes. But what the deuce was Tony doing at the château? I didn't arrange for that! Why was he in that spot, of all places? And where did he go?"

"Try to see him to-day and find out what—"

"Not on your life, my sweet!" he said mockingly. "That would be risky. I keep well away from them until I'm ready to instruct them. This brings me to our muttons. Sit down on that rock and listen."

She did so, and looked up at him.

"Don't look at me. Maxwell might come along. Bend your dreamy gaze, please, on those fishing smacks out there—'Yo—ho—for a fisherman's life!' Seem to be speculating on anything but on me. You will notice that I am beginning to poke in the sand?"

He dropped to one knee as he spoke, and began drawing lines with a pencil.

"Sweet, innocent soul, who rejoices in primary distractions!" he sneered suddenly and violently. It was like the opening of a door into the mean, dark places in his soul. "Now, if Maxwell sees us, he will think that the new companion and her old friend are innocently talking of nature."

"But Mr. Maxwell is still fast asleep," she said, looking away, as bidden.

"Is he?" he asked furiously, and dug the pencil into the sand, as if he were stabbing the object of his words. "Why do you suppose I made you especially careful as we talked under the window?"

"I don't know——" she faltered.

"Because, not ten minutes before, Maxwell came out by that sunken door."

"By that door?" she echoed, and remembered the footprint. "Then—then—maybe he followed the priest!"

"Maybe; or maybe he was hanging about within easy earshot. The latter, most likely. I tell you, Janet, he's the one we have to be careful of. Not the silly, old countess, or the mutton-headed count, but that fellow who knows too damn much about everything!"

"Yes—the orchids. Oh, I wanted to scream, Arthur! Do you think you can keep up the rôle? If he goes more deeply into the subject——"

"Oh, you trust little Willy! All night I've been reading up about the things. You've often spoken of my marvelous memory. Well, it's soaked with orchid learning so that I could pass a college examination on the subject. No," he added, "I'm not afraid of what he knows about orchids. I'm afraid of what he knows that *I don't know he knows.*"

"Why was he up so early?" Janet pondered, following her insistent thought. "Where does that room lead to? Did he follow the priest? Is he on your track, or my track, or *our* track? I tell you, Arthur, you may well be afraid of him. I am."

He permitted himself one long, forceful look at her.

"Get over it! Let us say he followed Ricet. He'll find out nothing. But I admit that the situation here isn't one to trifle with. There's no settling down cozily at The Gulls, believe me, and that's what I wanted to speak about to you this morning."

In a wholly peaceful tone, as gentle and unemphatic as if he were telling her of some book that he had read, Arthur sketched what he meant her to do:

"Time is of value, my dear. So begin to-night. I know that the countess means to have you always go up with her to her bedroom, take down a dictation of what she wants done the following day, and when she is actually in bed, read her to sleep. She suffers, poor love," he interjected, with a brutal mockery, "from insomnia. You see how close you'll come to the jewels? You will be pretty stupid if you can't see where they are placed either by her or by the maid.

"I've investigated both her room and the count's. Except in the strong room where the plate is kept—the combination of which is known only to the butler—there is not the vestige of a safe in the whole château. But the stuff we want is *not* put in the strong room. The countess goes upstairs with her jewels on. She does not come down again that night, nor does the count, nor her maid. They are placed in some secret place, which is probably built into the upper part of the house. Gain her confidence little by little, and she will not hesitate to be frank about this before you. That's the first thing you're to find out."

"And when that's found out?" Janet asked, gazing out at sea.

"You will tell me. I'll watch for the right night. They all take brandy in their coffee at dinner——"

She lunged around and looked at him, a new terror in her eyes.

"Nothing like that," she whispered, her breath broken; "nothing like that!"

"Keep looking at the sea!" he muttered, in a quick rage. "Try to squeeze

a little audacity into your soul that's been fed so long on pap it's on crutches. The brandy will be doctored with nothing stronger than a South American opiate that will keep any one of them from suffering from the countess' insomnia, on that night, at least."

"How will you manage—this?" Janet asked.

"No matter. I'm used to little things of that sort. If fate doesn't sharpen my tools for me, I sharpen them for myself. I'll succeed, never fear! If I know where the jewels are, and can prepare to get at them—and if I can have a free field for just an hour late some night—we'll make a killing and get off without the least bit of trouble. But I want it to be soon. Every day here will be a day against us. I feel that somehow. Your duties as reader will begin to-night. You may not find out a thing. But keep your eyes and ears open for the slightest suggestion. To-morrow night or the night after, or the one after that, may clear the way."

"What is the priest—and the other man—to do?" Janet asked. "Why are they in Nantes?"

"I'll tell you the rest when you've pulled off your share. We'll meet again—but not like this—and not on the bridge. I believe that in life, as on the stage, it's never wise to repeat business. I'll give you the tip as soon as I've thought of something. Now we'd better get back."

"Together?" Janet asked, rising.

"That's a fool question! Of course, together. Didn't we start out that way? If we came back by different paths, or alone, wouldn't it be a very natural thing to ask, *'Why?'*"

"Yes—if we were seen."

"Always count *in* the chance that counts *against!* So we will assume that we were both heard and seen. Therefore, I joined you for an early-morning walk. I come back with you openly—and hungry—and gay—and artless. Now, do you see?"

She followed him over the sheeted silver of the beach, the sea behind her bidding her a prophetic farewell. Her earlier dream of peaceful days in Dres-

den took on the complexion of the rankly impossible. To expect that she could come through this slime with gain to save her body from hardship, but without its filth upon her soul, seemed sharply and suddenly a fantasy of madness. The feeling persisted with her all the way back through the scented, sun-warmed morning, until the château's angled roof showed against the sky like spears against an azure canopy.

"That entreating mournfulness of gaze suits your blue eyes down to the ground," Arthur said, in an amusedly cynical tone that made the blood darken her cheek. "Nevertheless, get rid of it. Look as if you were a healthy, unimaginative young woman, awfully glad at having got hold of a good job, who has enjoyed this innocent morning ramble with her childhood's friend! And don't forget the business before you—you're to *get cozy with the countess!*"

CHAPTER VI.

But Janet felt that she would not be admitted to the boudoir privacy of her mistress with the ease and swiftness that Arthur anticipated. And she was right. When she was summoned to the countess that night, she found her already in bed, propped against a pile of pale-blue silk pillows. The secrerries of her toilet remained hers and her maid's. She wore a silk lounging robe over her nightgown, and a boudoir cap, wreathed with tiny rosebuds, concealed her hair.

The jewels were nowhere to be seen.

"To-night, Miss Eustis; I mean you to talk to me about yourself," were her first, disconcerting words. "I am so wide awake. So, after Katia has put on another log, and we are very cozy, you must entertain me."

The melancholy-eyed, middle-aged Russian woman who served her as maid laid on the fading embers some birch saplings and a quantity of driftwood gathered almost at the château's doors. In a moment the big, medieval, sumptuous room had been turned by the fitful flames and the unevenly flickering

shadows into a place of elfinlike beauty and mystery.

Janet steadied her nerves, and talked, in very good French and with ease and humor, of her struggles, some real, some imaginary. All the details of the supposed service with which the forged recommendations accredited her rippled from her with a cleverness that was astonishing to herself. But she was learning her lesson well. Lady Heskett and the others became to her, from the necromancy of her own lies, real human beings, some of whose foibles, all well known to her, she felt at liberty to speak of, while about others she kept silence in a way that could only please a present employer.

"Had she many diamonds?" the countess asked, speaking of Lady Heskett.

"She wore some very beautiful necklaces," Janet replied, "but I was told by her companion that many of them were clever imitations of the originals, which were safe in the Bank of England."

"A wise woman!" the countess murmured, and shivered under the lace and silk. "I think I will soon do that. It is the only safeguard against thieves. And yet," she added, "perhaps not. If you did not let it be known, you might stand the chance of being robbed just the same. If you *did* have the fact circulated, the thieves who have you marked would not believe it. So—I would be just where I am now. Oh, I am so frightened all the time!"

"Are you?" Janet asked, and she struggled hard to meet the woman's dark, uncannily glistening eyes.

Here, surely, was her chance to find out something about the jewels. A well-placed word might lead easily to a first confidence, then to another. Plainly the countess was in an approachable mood, and in need of sympathy.

But Janet could not speak that word. She was stolidly receptive, but not inquiring.

"Are you?" was all she could say.

"Why, of course. Why else should I keep my presence at the château a secret? The public knows that Hugh is here and the count's secretary. But my

husband and I are supposed to be still at our villa in Algiers, or taking a little holiday in Tunis. I have not yet recovered from the shock of that attack upon us on the highroad near Paris, a few months ago. That was the third attempt to rob me during two years. What peace has one when life is like that?" she exclaimed petulantly.

"Poverty has one comfort that evades the rich," Janet smiled. "When you have nothing, no one molests you. That supreme peace can belong only to the empty-handed."

The countess lay staring at the flames, looking utterly miserable.

"The remedy is worse than the disease, as our great Sophie Arnould once said. Only the rich get anything out of life. And if, for fear of being molested, one cannot use one's money to surround one's self with what one adores, what does one gain? My mania is for beautiful things. Precious stones exert over me a fascination that is terrible. In spite of all the inconvenience, the constant terror, I could not keep away from them."

The countess shivered again, and, before the talk was over, she had coughed several times.

"I believe I caught cold to-night!" she exclaimed furiously. "The first touch of winter came in the air to-day. Every day now it will increase. I shall stay on until Christmas, and then fly from the snow to Algiers. Will you like accompanying me?"

As Janet played her part, she saw that the countess was beginning to show signs of real discomfort. She began to sneeze in a racking way.

"I believe it's influenza!" she cried, and, sitting up, she struck furiously at the pillows. "Katia should not have let the fire go down! I shall look a fright to-morrow. Pull the rope, Miss Eustis, and don't leave me until that stupid cow comes!"

The countess fairly hissed her directions for quinine and brandy to the apologetic maid. Janet stayed beside her while they were being administered, and had a curious sense of being an on-looker at an entertainment. The great

lady's snarls and brutal abuse outdid the vulgarity of the old market women whom Janet had often heard quarreling over their baskets of fish outside the Halles.

The experience turned her into an active hater of this serene autocrat who felt it an injury that the slightest ill should befall her, and who visited her wrath insultingly upon a woman who was no better than her slave.

"I suppose she would like to take a horsewhip to her menials," Janet thought, as she went back to her room, "if the weather dared to be cloudy on a day when some affair of hers called for it to be fine."

She fell asleep thinking of illnesses that she had had among the wretchedly poor students of the Quartier, with neither fire, nurse, or doctor, when she had struggled back to a sort of health as best she could.

But the countess' attack was more serious than she had at first supposed. Influenza had really presumed to enter the Château of The Gulls and to fasten upon the throat and nose of the pampered mistress. During the two weeks following, though attended by a doctor brought down from Paris, and with Katia as nurse, she ached as horribly in every joint as if she had been a peasant.

Neither Arthur nor Janet was allowed to enter the sick room. The former suggested that he cut short his visit, but the count begged him to remain. The place was doleful to the stupid, full-fed man, who found his guest amusing and stimulating. So, as time went by, the party in the château fell into the habit of separating for diversion into twos—the count and Arthur, Janet and Hugh.

"You're in luck," Arthur managed to say to Janet one day when Christmas was not a week off. "You can go off on horseback with Maxwell, and get air and exercise to keep you in condition. But I have to roll around the country in a motor with the blinds almost all the way down, and listen to the bromidic observations of a fathead. I almost went to sleep yesterday. Count Lamballeu has about as much gray matter

under his skull as you could get inside a peanut. How are you getting on with Maxwell?"

"Oh, we get on amiably," she said, not admitting him into her secret thoughts. "I am merely a riding companion."

"But don't forget he's a sharp one! Watch out for him. Any question from him requires careful thought before you reply. Don't let him spring anything on you. Think he suspects at all?"

They were pacing to and fro at a good distance from the château's windows, and far from any trees that could shelter an eavesdropper. The air was a shimmering wonder and gloriously bracing. After a few days of the bitter cold that had prostrated the countess, the winter bite had departed, and the weather had changed to autumn again.

At Arthur's last question, Janet looked at him straightly.

"I don't think he suspects," she answered, "but he does not like you."

"I get that myself. He thinks the countess is getting sweet on me. Maybe he's afraid I might come in for a legacy from her and so lessen his hoolie, for the damned, lucky devil comes in for all of this!"

He hated Hugh, because the chances of life that had sent this man, who was just about his own age, into the world as into a padded nest, had sent him to a gutter and a whirlpool. His father had been a gambler, his mother a circus woman; both had died when he had been a child. He had been raised in a haphazard way, had fallen in with people who measured life by spurious weights and measures, and with the gambler's inherited instinct that made him loathe plodding and the small, conservative gains of honesty, he had eagerly sucked in the teachings that advocated adventure, risk, lying—that demanded a big something for a meretricious nothing.

He had chanced on Janet in Brighton. She had been living there with an aunt who had preferred England and some modest travel on her small annuity, which had vanished at her death, to a settled home at greater expense in

her native New York. Janet had been just past twenty at this time. She had been radiant and joyous. He had been handsome, well dressed, and stopping at one of the big hotels. That they were both Americans had been the first bond to draw them closer.

He had told her that he was the London representative of a San Francisco firm, and she had believed him. As his infatuation for her had grown, he had come to regard her much as he would a dainty for his palate, and he had defiantly made it a point never to deny himself the luxuries that he craved if it meant the spending of his last cent. So he had remorselessly dazzled her into marriage, pouring out the last of a gambling haul, previously made at Monte Carlo, in showing her Italy. A few months later, in Rome, when his sensuous flare of passion had been fluttering like a dying candle, he had told her the flat truth about himself.

Janet had gone back to the aunt at Brighton, who had been very ill, and had stayed with her for one hushed and lonely year until the aunt had died and the annuity had ended. Afterward, Janet had commenced the fight for life by honest work.

Arthur had disappeared into the shadows with which he was familiar. From time to time, his fancy for his wife reviving, he had come out of them, found her, and sought to win her back and to make her a partner in his tricks and deals.

Until this time, he had always failed. This time, when destitution had turned her to ice with fire under it, he had succeeded. And so it had become possible for them to walk as they were walking now along the garden paths of the Château of The Gulls, plotters, linked together by the interests of a mutual crime.

The thoughts of both had glanced back over the years to the events that had resulted in this situation. But they were not in a mood to find reminiscence pleasant or timely. There was work to be done. Janet spoke first:

"We've landed in a bog. We've been here almost a month, and I haven't

found out anything of value. The countess is really ill. Suppose this state of affairs lasts for weeks longer?"

"Suppose it does!" he said, controlling his face so that the snapping rage in his tone did not slip into his expression. "Isn't it worth a patient game? If you find yourself with a bank account of thirty thousand dollars—"

"That may be only a wild dream of yours. Perhaps I'll never find out where the stones are kept—"

"If *you* don't—I will. Then, if you do what will be required of you at the last, to land them, you'll get your share."

"Remember," she said, a curious thickness in her tone, "you are only to take the brooch. You must keep your word with me. Can I rely on you?"

He looked at her and smiled. Broadly, mockingly he smiled.

"You fool!" he said very quietly; and making her what would appear to an onlooker to be a courteous bow, he turned on his heel and entered the château.

CHAPTER VII.

That day Janet rode with Hugh. The habit that she wore was one of the countess', but, although it did not fit her slender body properly, its effect, and that of the severe tricorn hat, gave her an engagingly boyish look.

She rode well. Her aunt, who had been a Kentuckian and to whom horses had been a fetish, had paid for the luxury of riding lessons for her. Janet had inherited the horsewoman's joy in feeling herself on the back of a good mount, being carried on and on, the morning breeze stinging her face, the green world and the blue sea swimming mistily before her. Almost she forgot what she was. Almost she was the girl she seemed to be, a girl who might look honestly into Hugh's soldierly eyes—those eyes that gazed at her more steadily than there was any need for, and with a sympathetic comradeship that was unashamedly candid. Before they alighted to rest at an inn, a little this side of Nantes, Hugh had told her a great deal about himself. She knew

much of his boyhood, his mother, his aims, his beliefs.

The inn had a garden filled with little tables, and the day was so mild that they were able to lunch there. Over their heads, a parrot, of a cozy, home-making nature, chattered in a way to provoke laughter. The fat, sleek cat, which is a settled part of most French homes of the middle class, smoothed herself against their knees. The stout, cherry-faced innkeeper and his talkative, beaming wife, both evidently saturated with happiness in each other's society, were another tender note in the little scene.

And there, in the soft air of an autumn that died with evident unwillingness, with her blood tingling from the healthy exercise and warmed by closeness to a vibrating human being who evidently included her very tenderly in his outlook, Janet, while her heart seemed to melt curiously, came to a decision that was as solid as iron.

"I will not go on with this!" she said to herself. "I must keep faith with Arthur to a certain extent—enough to prevent my betraying or sacrificing him—but I will not go on with this. From this moment I wash my soul of every vestige of it. I don't know what I'll do to get out of it—but I'll do something. I have not yet become a thief. I never, never will be one!"

Hugh saw the delicate color quicken in her cheeks as the thought took gripping hold of her. She lifted the thick little glass that held the best Chablis the inn could furnish, and for the first time that day looked full into Hugh's eyes.

"Drink with me?" she asked softly, but with a deep trembling in the tone.

As he obeyed, leaning a little closer to her, a something stole from his spirit that touched her as directly as if a real finger had been laid upon her.

"This," said Janet, "is to a new road that I am about to take. Will you wish me luck upon it?"

"I do," he said simply, and drank some of the wine, adding, as he set the glass back:

"But is it a road that leads very far from my own?"

"Does that matter?"

She could not help the glow that filled her, as if somewhere the sun had escaped from a cloud. She was married to Arthur. She had come close to crossing the Rubicon that separates those with clean hands from those with foul ones. She had no right to feel happy that it mattered to Hugh Maxwell whether he was ever to see her upon the new road that she was determined to take. Yet, for all that, her spirit exulted. Having known sorrow so long, and bitterness, and failure, having felt that everything that made life worth while was finished for her, she exulted, rioting in the feeling—yet secretly, knowing that while it would be a memory to warm the lean, self-sacrificial future before her, it would yield nothing real that she could take to her wistful heart.

Hugh was looking at her in a curious way.

"Yes, it matters," he said clearly, the tone distinctly sad. "I won't tell you how much now. But—if you ever need a friend upon the new road, whatever sort of road it may be, and to whatever goal it may lead, I ask you to remember me. I don't think there is anything in life that I would rather do than help you!"

"But why?" Janet asked tremulously; and now the fear that was always with her, though sometimes it drowsed, lifted its head. "Do you think that there are dangers before me?"

"Perhaps," he said, and nodded to his own thought.

"I seem a woman who cannot stand alone?"

"Frankly, you do." He bent closer to her with the illuminating smile that she had grown to love. "The quality that appeals to a man's protectiveness comes from you to me more strongly than it has from any woman that I have ever met. I think you may need a friend some time. I wish you'd promise that I may be that friend, if the time comes."

A long glance hung between them.

It was like a golden cord vibrating with the beating of their hearts. And it had a likeness to the golden decision that had come to Janet. She could look at him with gratitude and happiness and not be ashamed! There was victory in the way she flung out her hand.

"Although, when I leave here, we very likely won't meet again—I am happy that I matter this much to you—very happy!"

Their fingers met for a moment. His were as warm and strong as they were brown; hers seemed to fold up like flowers within his clasp. He looked at her tenderly, boldly.

"I am not going to lose you so easily, my friend. You will see!"

As he spoke, they saw beyond the greenish-gray door in the stone wall the motor from the château pass. Under the half-drawn blind, through the open window, cigar smoke floated. The car moved slowly. The thought of Arthur had at that moment a nightmare quality for Janet. Her aversion and fear of him showed more frankly in her face than she guessed.

"They are coming here!" she exclaimed, half starting up.

"They're not," Hugh answered. "You forget that my aunt and uncle are not supposed to be at the château. The motor is bound for home, in time for *déjeuner*." He broke into a sudden laugh. "Your sprightly friend is having a stupid time of it with the count. I wonder that he endures it. He must be bored to a jelly."

Janet made no reply to this.

"Why does he stay here?" Hugh demanded impatiently.

"The count keeps coaxing him." Janet hoped that her voice sounded as indifferent as she tried to make it. "He—he—is amusing. Don't you think so?"

"Oh, very!"

As she had arisen, Hugh also stood up. A thoughtful smile passed lightly over his face. She studied him cautiously, but intently.

"You are right," he continued. "What you *see* of your friend—the surface of him—is amusing. But"—he

paused and added, with a slow meaning that startled her—"he is as cold as a fish! He belongs to the class that preys easily, even gayly. I would not like to be in his power, still less would I want any woman to be in his power—to be even close to him."

Janet's fingers were trembling as she drew on her riding gloves.

"How well do you know him?" Hugh asked, and it was impossible to avoid the directness of his eyes.

"A long—long time—as he said," she replied.

"Don't think me interfering," he continued gently, "but does he matter at all to you? He told my aunt that you had been a friend of his since childhood, but that he had not seen you for years until just before he came here. Do you take a very deep interest in this childhood's friend?"

Hugh's expression was so equable that Janet could not bring herself to think that his words were caused by any suspicion of Arthur. No; they were prompted by a deep liking for her, and as he had come to estimate Arthur as a thistledown, mercurial soldier of fortune, he was subtly warning her against him. She meant to tell as much of the truth as she could.

"Yes, I do," she said. "I should be sorry for any trouble that came to him. Whether my opinion of him is good or bad, I should be sorry to see him hurt."

Her heart was beating so fast that its flurries filled her throat as she passed Hugh and went down to the gateway in the old wall. He, meanwhile, entered the inn parlor to pay what he owed, so that Janet had a few moments to herself.

A frenzy to be away from the scene gripped her; to finish with Arthur, to say good-by to Hugh, to have done with shameful things and this chimera of happiness, at one and the same time. If she could have followed her impulse, she would have gone straight to her horse and galloped away to some retreat, without ever seeing or speaking to Hugh again.

It was not only a vague fear that beset her, not only pain that she must put

away Hugh's friendship and sympathy; it was a sharp and clarifying knowledge of herself—that already she loved him, so much that, go where she would, she could never forget him. She had but one hope, but one thing to strive for—that at least he might never know her real mission to the château.

CHAPTER VIII.

She noticed that when Hugh joined her, he had grown very pale. As he helped her to mount, he looked up at her, and under the cloud upon his gray eyes she saw a fire. This thrilled her—yet sent fright and regret over her. She read that look aright. She must keep him from putting its meaning into words.

"Of what use?" her lonely soul sang within her. "Of what use, but to make the going away from him forever harder than it is now?"

It was this feeling of disaster, this sad love echoing through her, that made her snatch at a feverish, hard gayety. She struck her horse, and galloped ahead of Hugh.

"Let's race!" she called back. "See who reaches the château first!"

He followed her, sometimes coming so close to her that their horses sagged together, sometimes outstripping her a little, and then falling back. But always they were both aware of a spiritual declaration of passion that he was eager to put into words and that she was flying from.

"I love you! You can't escape hearing it. I mean to look straight into your eyes and tell you—that I love you, love you!" Hugh was saying inwardly, and Janet felt it in every drop of her tingling blood.

The race might have continued all the way to the château, but that, on entering a wood, a startling thing brought both horses to a sudden pause. From the underbrush on the path ahead of them, and not more than twenty yards distant, a figure crawled out slowly, and then stood erect in the woodland's flickerings. It was a priest. He made a movement of retreat, but, on second

thoughts, stood his ground and watched them advance toward him at a walk.

"He's a forbidding-looking animal," Janet heard Hugh say, "even if he is a priest. But don't look so frightened. He's only standing aside for us to pass."

The words helped her to nerve herself. She shrugged and forced herself to look straight at the man. He seemed a Corsican or a Greek. His eyes had the blackness and the brilliance of coal; his face was the color that she had seen on nicotine-stained fingers; his loose lips had a settled, secretive one-sidedness. Though he raised his hand in benediction in answer to Hugh's nod, Janet felt his half-lowered eyes meet her own in a flicker of abominable knowledge. It was as if he were saying: "*We* know—*we* know!"

The reins dropped from her loose fingers. The pony, quick to notice the slackness, pointed its ears, made a bound that almost unseated her, and went like the wind down the curving forest path.

"Don't be frightened!" She heard Hugh's intense whisper as he pressed hard behind her. "There's a wire fence just ahead, and he *must* stop. Just hold on, somehow, and it will be all right!"

She nodded, her teeth set, and a moment later, when the pony ran against the slender, but formidable, obstacle, she slipped unhurt from his back. But she was trembling and dizzy. As if she were dreaming, she felt Hugh's arms go about her to steady her; she felt his heartbeats.

She twisted herself from his balancing hold and braced herself against a tree. They were silent while he made the horses secure to posts in the wire fence—silent, until he turned and came slowly closer to her.

"That man frightened you. Had you ever seen him before?"

Following her determination to tell as much of the truth as was possible, she nodded.

"Was it the day you took that early walk with Langstreet?"

"Yes," she said.

"Where?" Hugh asked, and she had a feeling that her answer would mean

much to him. "Where did you see him?"

"In the garden—at the château. I wondered what he was doing there."

"Prowling around?" said Hugh.

"Yes, prowling around."

"I saw him, too," he said slowly. And then, although in a sense Janet was prepared for his next words, they came upon her in some subtle way as a surprise. "I have a feeling that you will leave this place soon. I have a feeling that something may happen—I don't know what—to make you decide to go suddenly. So I am going to say to you now, what I want to say—*must* say."

He came close to her, and lifted the cold hand that hung limply at her side.

"I love you so much," he said simply. "I love you, Janet. I feel that you have gone through deep and bitter waters. If you will let me—if you *can*—I'll make your life warm and sheltered and sweet."

The saddest words that she had ever heard! As Janet stood before him in the dancing leaflight of the wood, she felt that though she lived to be very old, she would not again hear words so sad as these. Desolation seemed to flow over her in dark waves. She felt the slow tears come and halt upon her lashes as, gazing at him, she slowly shook her head.

"You don't—and couldn't—care for me in that way?" Hugh asked.

She could not assent to this in words. To do so would have been staining what she revered. She remained silent, her head drooping, the heavy tears creeping down her cheeks.

"Tell me, Janet—is that it?"

The words were burning and unsteady, although when he lifted her hand to his lips, it was the gentle kiss of service that he placed there.

"No," she said softly; "that is not it."

"Then—" he began, masterful hope flaring over his face.

"But what you offer me is—is—impossible!" she hurried on. "Just as hopeless as if one of us were dead and the other living. Never speak of it to me again, please," she continued, growing stronger, and dashing away her

tears. "I'll go away soon, and there can never be any change from what I said before, and say now. We can never be anything to each other—no, not even friends!"

She tried in a determined way to pass him and reach the horses, but he put his hand on her shoulder, holding it fiercely, yet with his fingers flickering with the temptation to change the grasp into a caress.

"This isn't fair, Janet. No, it is not! Listen to me! You have admitted that you love me! Knowing that, am I going to take this mysterious dismissal without a question? What parts us? If you love *me*, then you don't love some other man. And you are not married! Yet you are going to wipe me out as if I had never existed for you? Do you suppose I'd let you do that without knowing why? I ask you to marry me as soon as you can—whenever you will. If you will not—then give me your reasons."

Janet had grown very calm. She drew down his hand and went to her horse. For a moment she stood patting the animal's damp, quivering skin, thinking. Could she speak enough of the truth to show him the gulfs between them never to be crossed? Enough at least to keep him from ever speaking of love to her again? That was a torture that she must in some way forestall.

There was cool decision in the clear blue of her eyes when she next looked at him.

"You take me at my own valuation entirely! You ask no questions. It has not occurred to you that, in order to get such a position as I have with the countess, I might not have been quite honest. Now"—there was a tinge of defiance in the sad smile that passed over her face—"you will have your first touch of disillusionment. I am married. I am not Miss Eustis. I deliberately lied, you see!"

She saw that the news hurt and dismayed him. He stood without speaking for a moment.

"Say what you are thinking!" Janet whispered, in anguish. "Say that you despise me!"

"Despise you? You hurt me when you say that," he replied gently. "You thought that the countess would prefer her companion to be unmarried? Was that why——"

"Don't you know that the less a woman who works has to explain, the better?" she asked, with a touch of hysteria. "I'm not a widow, and it would be hard to explain my husband! Let us get back," she insisted faintly and turned from him.

His touch fell on her shoulder. She thrilled under it, but did not move or look at him.

"Don't for a moment think that I judge you for this subterfuge. It's harmless. It hurts no one but me. But you said that we were not to be even friends. You don't mean that? You won't shut me out altogether?"

"I must. And you must accept this decision as absolute. I—I—can't say any more," she ended feebly.

In silence he helped her mount. They went silently back over the path to the crossroad that would lead them in the direction of the château. This was so narrow that they rode singly. Their horses' hoofs, beating on drifts of dead leaves, made a rushing sound like a small cataract's murmuring; the sun shot at them through the leaves like eyes prying on privacy; there was a sorrowful sighing of the wind around them as they passed through the wood in a separateness that seemed to typify their future.

When they gained the highroad, and came side by side, their first look at each other had the import and the eloquence of volumed sound. Between entering the wood and leaving it, they had tested the essence of a lifetime. One had said: "I offer you everything." The other had said: "I take nothing—I give nothing." It was the end.

But just before passing under the canopy at the château door, Hugh spoke. His voice was gentle and impersonal, but the words made Janet think of a life rope flung to one in danger—they were just as strong and just as merciful:

"If you ever come to think differently, remember what I told you at the inn. If I can help you, and you'll let me, you'll find me ready!"

CHAPTER IX.

She went straight to her room. The idea that Arthur might seek her, speak to her, was overpoweringly hateful to her. She held her breath until her door was locked behind her.

Tears made a hard ache all through her, but there were none in her eyes. Without taking off either her hat or her gloves, she went to the hearth and stood staring at the fire. The present had faded from her thoughts. Her fancy showed her Hugh as she had first seen him, approaching the open door of the motor in which she, a stranger, had waited. The first sight of his browned, resolute face! Of his smile that had both warmed and shamed her! And his voice, the most persuasive that she had ever heard, murmuring the false name that she had given! A shudder ran through her; she closed her eyes.

"I might have known in that first look that I was bound to love him," she thought, with a melting self-pity. "And I do—God help me!"

She sank beside a chair and prayed, for the first time since that day in Rome when her husband had told her the truth about himself. If she could go back and be that girl in Brighton who had never known Arthur! But failing that, if she could even go back and be the bitter, half-starved failure whom he had found in that dismal studio over the gray, sad street! Then she had been numb, where now she ached and burned! Then she had not seen Hugh, had not learned the flavor of irremediable regret!

"You have punished me!" she prayed, crouched beside the chair. "I accept it. I cry for forgiveness. Help me now in what I have to accomplish—and let me go from here in peace, my shame hidden! Grant me that!"

It was then, as she lay exhausted, her head upon her arms, that she heard, as so often before, that small, insinuating

knock upon the door—that ghost of a knock—which had always meant guilt. To-day it had a still darker meaning. It said: "You have no choice. Answer. Your master is calling to you."

In a dull, resentful way, she slowly lifted her head and turned her face toward the door. But she did not move. She crouched there in a dogged determination to give no answer, while waiting for the knock to come again.

But the silence continued, while her heart's apprehensive beating filled her ears. Something white—a small oblong that was being gently pushed through the narrow space at the threshold—caught her gaze. It was a folded paper. As it lay there, it beckoned and drew her by its clutch upon the most supreme instinct possessed by human beings—that of self-preservation. After another rebellious pause, she went over and lifted it. There was only a line:

The library—just as soon as you can!

She grew sharply rigid. This was a cry of "Danger!" It could not be disobeyed. She threw off her hat and gloves, and pressed her hands hard to eyes and cheeks for a moment, to wipe out the look of panic that she could feel in the one, and bring back life to the flesh that was chilled and numb to her touch.

When she stepped into the hall, she paused beside the door, listening. A murmur of voices, hurried steps, the opening or shutting of a door, would have seemed ominous of the approach of exposure. But the big house was filled with its usual luxurious quiet. It seemed the perfection of safeguarded peace. Not a hint was given of that malign and secret intent within it that meant robbery, and that might not stop at death.

A cold dread that made her mouth taste of brass filled her as she went quickly, and as quietly as possible, to the library. At first, the big room, all brown and crimson from wainscoting and velvet curtains, seemed empty. While every sense questioned like an insect's quivering antennæ, Janet went

to the bookshelves, passed her hand along a row of volumes, as if searching, and coughed softly.

She heard a movement behind her, and, turning, saw Arthur step out of an angle that was protected by a tall Chinese screen. Keeping at a distance, they faced each other. He frowned a look of caution at her.

"Have you seen this, Miss Eustis?" he asked, as he came to the study table and placed his hand on a heavy open volume spread out there. It was filled with colored reproductions of famous paintings. "I've been browsing over it."

She went to him in silent obedience, and looked down at the spot where he had placed his palm. A paper covered with his fine writing was flattened on the page. He pointed to it, and obediently she read:

The old lady is going to make her début at dinner to-night. Here's your chance to talk a lot of twaddle to her about its importance, so that you can coax her to hang the stuff on herself—at least a good part of it. Then keep close to her until you see where it's put. Make yourself so charming and necessary that she'll keep you with her till she is ready for bed. You must do this. I want things to come to a crisis in a rush. After you've read this, you will go up to her and play up as I tell you. I want her to come down decked to-night—and I want you to locate the stuff to-night—and I want to arrange it so that we can both clear out of here in another twenty-four hours. We must!

When she had read the last underscored word, he lifted the paper, crumpled it in his hand, and flung it into the wood fire. Janet, her eyes on the doorway into the hall and her hearing strained for the slightest sound that might be threatening, waited for him to stroll back to the table.

"It's really a most unique collection—all one's favorites!" he said distinctly, adding in a breath: "You're on?"

"What's changed your plans?" she asked, bending over the book. "Yes, these are really lovely!"

"Can't lose time by giving *reasons* now!" he returned irritably, as he began to turn the pages of the volume. "After all, there's no one like Rem-

brandt. Understand—I want you to clear the way for me—to-night!"

"But suppose I can't find out anything?" she temporized.

Of course, she did not mean to obey him. But neither did she mean to betray him. Her own safety was at stake as well as his. There was a luminous watchfulness in his eyes, a hard, pinched look to his mouth, which quivered nervously—marks that she had often noticed in him before, and that she knew always meant suspense.

"You can," he said, between his almost closed lips, "if you're not a stupid fool! Flatter the woman—hang about her—worm her confidence out of her. You can be charming enough when you try. I've watched you with Maxwell. I fancy if I wanted something from him, you could get it, all right!"

She passed over the words with a light, pointless disdain. All she wanted was to find out just where they stood—what, if any, new thing threatened. After that, she would form her own plan of action, no matter how different it might be from his.

"Look," he said, with a murmuring laugh, "at this exquisite Botticelli. The Botticelli mouth—you can always pick it out!" She felt his foot touch hers very slightly. "See if there's any one in the hall," he whispered. "Go out—then come back as if you'd forgotten something."

She obeyed. As she crossed the threshold, the count was just waddling heavily, and with an after-luncheon discomfort, across the space at the back, about to ascend the stairs. He paused at the bottom step, then went slowly up. She could hear his heavy breathing as he passed out of sight. With his vanishing, the stillness became uncanny. It had the eloquence that is in the silence of deep cañons, of deep woods, of deep seas when tranquil—all of them secretive and mysterious things. The thought made her shudder as she returned to where Arthur was bending most studiously over the book.

"The count was just going up," she whispered.

"Old ass!" was the answer, so spite-

fully given that it was like the spit of a cat. "I've had my fill of him to-day, and I've got to play piquet with him to-night. I'd rather talk to the chef. Well," he added, "you've heard. Now get to work. Don't waste another minute!"

"Arthur," she pleaded, in a breath—but it was a burning breath, and she caught his arm—"give this up! I beg this of you! If you try to put this scheme through—you'll fail!"

He tore her fingers from his sleeve, and stepped away.

"What are you trying to do? Stand over there. Keep your eyes on that book!"

He strolled to the fire, saying clearly as he went:

"I never cared much for Franz Hals. There's a materialism about his women that jars frightfully." She could see that he was listening intently, after which his swift whisper followed: "Don't stop here any longer. Get out! And do what I tell you."

With seeming submissiveness, she left the room. But her soul was a flare of defiance. She had obeyed him for the last time.

When she had changed from her habit, she went to the countess. But, during the hours that she stayed with her, the jewels were not mentioned. The mistress of The Gulls was almost playfully happy at the idea of joining the family group again. While Katia patiently massaged her, as she lay back before the fire on a couch hung with leopard skins, a stream of vivacious babble left her lips.

"It will be good to see that dear Langstreet again! I have missed his quips. He has sent me most thoughtful messages by Katia. But, ah!—it is his own amusing self that I shall delight in for a little while now, before we go on to the south."

When the face treatment had been finished, when she had been brushed and perfumed to her liking, she told Katia to leave her, at the same time handing her a bound version of one of Bernstein's plays.

"Take it to Monsieur Langstreet,"

the countess directed. "Tell him that I want to talk it over after dinner with him. Then give the rest of your time to arranging the *fichu* on my gown. Stupid Paris idiots!" she broke off. "After paying twenty-five thousand francs for a gown, to have the *fichu* look like a dust cloth!"

The maid kept saying: "*Oui, madame la comtesse*," and "*Vraiment, madame—vraiment*," in her usual self-efacing manner—but with a new and curious touch of disturbance, which, while it appeared to escape the attention of the woman stretched luxuriously before the fire, Janet, with a curious subsense, noticed and remembered later.

When the countess had handed the play to Katia, the woman had straightened as if a finger had prodded her; a tinge of color had crept under her leathery, thin cheeks; her tired eyes had lightened briefly, in a secretive way, the falling lashes quickly guarding them. Whether she was pleased or the reverse at having to seek Arthur with the book, Janet could not decide, but that it stirred some emotion within her was evident.

"You won't want me again, until you dress, *madame la comtesse*?" she asked, pausing halfway to the door.

"Leave me in peace till then. Miss Eustis will read me to sleep. And she will stay on until I awaken. When she rings, come."

The program was fulfilled to the letter. It was a curious experience to Janet to sit there by the wood fire in the lovely room, as rich in coloring as an Italian chapel, and read poetry to the countess so that she might sink into a beauty nap before the dinner at which she meant to shine. Reading poetry—while she was like a hare, damp and strangling from the chase—while feeling her back against the wall, danger on every side, and not knowing what the morrow, or indeed the many to-morrows beyond it, held for her! Reading poetry—and Rossetti's, at that—filling the soul with sad music—wonderful cadences—melting words!

The countess had chosen the English poet, as she was vigorous in improving

herself in the language of "that dear Langstreet," and to the words:

So it is, my dear,
she fell asleep.

Janet read on softly aloud, lingering over the phrases, which gradually filled her with a desolating sort of happiness. In them Hugh was speaking to her:

"So it is, my dear.
All such things touch secret strings
For heavy hearts to hear.
So it is, my dear."

Love for him had touched the secret strings that lay deep in the best part of her—had swept them grandly so that they filled her with a conquering, cleansing, tumultuous music. Just in touching her life he had bettered it. And that he had found it possible to love her was something to comfort her through the dreariest hours that might await her.

"So it is, my dear," she murmured, as the book slipped to the floor, and she sat, elbow propped on knee, gazing into the fire. "Ah, 'so it is, my dear!' You have made me see."

But she had to be brutally honest with herself. When she recalled her life, spoiled at its beginning by a false step, her continued failures to earn a living, her constant self-denial, all the lonely, lean days during which hunger had not been unfamiliar to her, and then looked at the selfish, pampered creature dozing beside her, Janet knew she was still in instinct a brigand and a rebel.

She longed to be able to convert the luxurious waste in the lives of women like this doll to the stark needs of proud strugglers like herself—just the necessary stimulus for existence, just what air and water are to a plant! She longed to be able to say to this sleeping sybarite:

"I am your sister. I am in sore distress. The future is a horror to me. I have nothing. You have too much. It is right—*only right*—that you should hold out your hand to me!"

Ah, if she could do these things honestly, boldly, without being misunderstood and despised, she would!

But—a secret thief? That was dif-

ferent; yes, that was different! Nothing that she had suffered, or might still suffer, could make dishonesty anything but loathsome. Loving Hugh had wiped away all the false reasoning that had slowly fermented in her during her long battle with poverty, and that Arthur's temptation had ripened to desperation. She saw truly. And at what she saw, she shuddered.

How long her reverie lasted, she did not know, but when she looked up from the blaze, she found the countess, lying inertly in an attitude of lush comfort, steadily and thoughtfully regarding her from under lazily drooping lids.

"The poetry was effective, Miss Eustis!" She smiled and stretched her arms lazily. "Now, if you'll ring the bell for Katia?"

And with a nod, she dismissed her.

CHAPTER X.

The evening, from Arthur's point of view, was an irritating and an uneventful one. Some quip of fancy had made the countess array herself in a shepherdesslike simplicity. She was all in white and silver, fresh flowers in her girdle, but without a single jewel. Clearly, he told himself, any assistance at disrobing that Janet might be called upon to give her later would not unearth the secret whose disclosure was becoming so vitally important. More than this, matters so arranged themselves that during dinner and afterward there was no chance for a single confidential utterance between him and Janet.

But the crowning exasperation was the close attention bestowed upon him by both the count and Hugh Maxwell. When the former was not unearthing afresh every smallest memory that Arthur was supposed to have of his younger brother, the latter was bent upon perfecting what knowledge he had of orchids, the minutiae of hunting for them, and every technical item regarding their culture and growth.

Arthur acquitted himself well, while Janet listened, often stretched upon a cross fashioned of anxiety and terror.

He had never looked more charming, more boyish. His blond face and soft, brown eyes glowed with enthusiasm. He shrugged, smiled, followed up one witticism with another, while he was always careful to give vivid and accurate answers to all the questions that prodded him. Knowing how close he was treading to the edge of an abyss, it was amazing to Janet to see the dazzling, false self that he projected for the admiration and attention of people who, if they had but known him truly, would have fallen upon him as hounds upon a hare.

In fact, his duplicity was so flawless that Janet, to her own amazement, found herself listening to him almost as to one speaking the truth. His fascinating assurance was the most valuable asset a rogue could have. It was almost impossible not to take him at his apparent valuation, so perfect a counterfeit was he.

Hugh said little to Janet, and, as well as she could, she avoided even this little. But often, during dinner and afterward, as she let her own thoughts sweep over her, and tried to perfect a scheme for escape that would be like a magic thread leading her from this maze, she would find his eyes thoughtfully and tenderly regarding her. Just before the party separated for the night—the count having taken possession of Arthur for a last, short game of piquet—Hugh came to Janet's side. She was standing by the table in the hall on which the bedroom candles were placed.

"Can you realize," he asked, "that to-morrow will be Christmas Eve? Are you going to follow your American custom of hanging up your stocking for Santa Claus? Are you wondering what Christmas will bring to you?"

The candlelight, making a nimbus in the shadows of the big hall, held them together as if in a huge, misty ring. It intensified the milky pallor of Janet's face and showed upon her quivering mouth and wistful eyes the writing of her inward distress. For one moment she permitted herself a long, loving, and truthful gaze that plunged deeply into his eyes.

"The stocking for Santa Claus on Christmas Eve is put away with childhood, with blind faith in fairy gifts, and a good many other innocent things," she said, a hard thrill in the soft tones. "But I will make a Christmas wish. I'll ask for what I want most in all the world——"

"Happiness?" asked Hugh.

"Forgetfulness."

She sighed, took up the candle, looked at him once, and went slowly up the stairs. But he crossed to the banister, and when she had ascended a few steps, he laid his hand upon her fingers as they trailed over the wood.

"Is memory so bitter?" he asked.

"All hopeless things are bitter," Janet answered, twisting her fingers from beneath his. "Forgetfulness means emptiness—but emptiness has no sting." How yearning, how youthful, how piteous her face was as she added these last quivering words: "Pray that I may gain a humble spirit that has learned to accept. Pray that I may find peace. These are all that life can ever hold for me."

She moved from his sight into the shadows of the upper staircase. Hugh remained for a moment looking down at the hand that hers had touched. He still seemed to feel the cold, small fingers fluttering under his; still the somber blue gaze from her eyes haunted him—and the sound of her voice as she asked him to pray that she might have peace!

It was almost twelve o'clock. The Château of The Gulls seemed wrapped for the night in the stillness of sleep. Janet had changed her lounging robe, had brushed her hair, had tried to read, and at the end of an hour was still sitting, with wide, bright eyes, her hands loosely folded, her thoughts in a whirl. She was facing the probability of a wholly wakeful night, when the bell that communicated with the countess' apartment whirred so vigorously that she started to her feet, quivering.

Leaving the candle burning, and forgetting to close her door, she hurried to

the passage below. Her gaze darted to the door of the countess' room. It was standing open, and a lozenge-shaped patch of light lay upon the floor of the hall.

Before entering, she paused to gather her courage. Apprehension had rippled over her, leaving her flesh as chilled as if she were dead. What awaited her in that room? Disclosure? Disgrace? Humiliation in Hugh's eyes? Her breath broke.

But as the questions beat upon each other like waves, bewilderment, mixed with a whirling sense of relief, seized her. She heard the countess laughing—laughing with a wholly natural, unrestrained gaiety, with an exclamatory, bubbling childishness—and these sounds were mingled with little cries of admiration from Katia. Feeling the relief that comes when a chance step has saved one from a sudden, grievous fall, Janet went into the room. What she saw was this:

All the candles were lighted, and in the center of the circle of radiance the countess stood. She was dressed à la Madame de Pompadour—in a pale-blue panniered skirt, a stiff-pointed bodice cut low in front, a white periwig, and many patches. On her hair and neck, her bosom and arms, all the Lamballe jewel were spread like a firmament of many-hued stars.

Katia was kneeling before her, pinning up a fold of the gown, and a little farther back in the shadow sat the count and Hugh, both smoking, both amused and tolerant as at the antics of a mischievous child. Janet looked about quickly in search of Arthur, but he was not there. By this time she was so nonplused that even his presence in the countess' bedroom as a spectator of her splendor, to please her inordinate vanity, would not have held a modicum of surprise.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear Miss Eustis!" the countess called out gayly. "Sit down. This was an inspiration, and I thought I'd let you in as one of a small audience, composed of relatives. What do you think of me as the favorite of Louis? Eh? When I came

up, I was so bored—until suddenly I had my inspiration. What a lark to have a costume dinner on Christmas night! I wore this last spring at the Marquis de Poilliet's garden fête at Versailles. To-morrow we'll rummage the château for something to suit you and the rest. It will give some color to our dullness if, instead of being plain men and women of this ugly, stupid present time, we become glorious characters out of history—*n'est-ce pas?*"

Janet tried to say something that she knew would please the vanity of the countess, but the effort was beyond her. With Hugh's eyes upon her, although he remained at a distance with a look of understanding and comradeship on his face, she could not play the part as it was required of her. She sat there, silent, in a confused and helpless way.

"Come! Don't be stupid, Miss Eustis!" the countess exclaimed pettishly. "Have you nothing to say? Don't you think the dinner will be a rare bit of sport?"

"I think you woke Miss Eustis from sleep," the count remarked. "Every one has not your unquenchable gayety, *ma chère*—you, who have always turned night into day, or day into night, as your naughty fancy pleased."

"I am tired," was all that Janet could say; "very, very tired. I promise I'll be brighter to-morrow. All I can say now, madame la comtesse, is that the Pompadour herself couldn't have been more radiant."

But as she spoke perfunctorily what was expected of her, Janet was filled with another sort of wonder. Where was Arthur? What would be his feelings if he could see the countess blazing with the gems whose lure had brought him, a determined thief, to The Gulls?

"You'd better get to bed, Miss Eustis," the countess said, in a suddenly cool voice, her shrug peevish. "You don't enter into our nonsense very well. Good night."

Hugh looked at her tenderly, sitting forward with hands that she saw were fiercely clasped, but he said nothing.

"Good night," Janet murmured vaguely, and, rising, turned to leave.

It was then, when halfway to the door, that she saw what electrified her so that she came to a short pause for a few seconds. At the head of the bed, a panel in the wall stood open. A lighted candelabrum stood on a table beside it. On the floor and resting against a chair, an oil portrait, which, she recalled, had always covered the spot, was resting at an angle.

She was looking at the hiding place of the Lamballieu jewels! She had discovered the secret for which she had been brought to the château. In the most unexpected way, without effort or wish on her part, this knowledge—ominous, unwelcome, hateful—had been thrust upon her!

She managed to leave the room with a leisurely step, her head steady, but in the hall, as she groped her way to the stairs, life seemed to snap. She swayed and had to trail her hand along the walls for support, like one who walks in darkness and in dread of a precipice. When out of sight of the countess' room, she crouched against the banisters and fought the weakness. Gradually a determination steadied her. She would forget what she had seen! The secret of the panel behind the portrait should be *her* secret! Arthur should never hear one syllable of this discovery!

Her room, in the light of its one candle, after the twinkling illumination with which the countess had surrounded herself, looked dim. The fire was almost out—just a heap of embers that pulsed like a slowly beating heart. She felt afraid of the gloom, afraid of her thoughts. She craved sleep with a sort of burning fury—the oblivion that for a few hours would wipe out consciousness of herself, of the ugly reality of her present, and the desolating probability of the gray and lonely future that awaited her.

Her cold fingers shook as she undressed. Usually, she crept into bed in the darkness, but to-night she felt a nervous disinclination to blowing out the light. There was some-

thing childishly troubled about her, as, in her long nightgown with her hair plaited, she lifted the candle to a small table beside the bed. Still she hesitated. She felt so lonely, so in need of help, of comfort. Impetuously, as once before that day, she followed an impulse to pray, and, kneeling with an air of simple trustfulness, she flung her arms across the huge bed and laid her face upon it.

Her prayer was wordless—wordless even in her thoughts. It was more a *feeling* that surged upward calling for help. It was the voice of her spirit, laden with an ineffable demand that touched upon all her needs. She was far from that room, and close to the great Presence whose hand was to guide her—when she heard upon the deep silence a murmured and most amused laugh:

"Charming, charming! Marguerite before the arrival of Faust! Charming!"

So spoke a smooth, deriding voice, one that she knew well.

CHAPTER XI.

A hard quiver of fright and repulsion ran over her. Her prayer had been shattered by a sacrilegious touch. She turned upon her rigid knees and looked up into Arthur's face.

He was seated on the arm of a big chair, leaning against its back, his hands in his pockets—the perfection of ease and comfort and audacity. But another look told Janet that he was something more than this. As she struggled up, the fear in her gaze became double-edged. This was not the first time that she had seen that swimming brightness in his intent eyes; that menacing wildness of regard, foreshadowing an intention; that drowsy yet daring smile, eloquent of an obsessing thought.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded, stammering.

"Looking at one of the prettiest women I know, and under circumstances that make her quite dangerously attractive to me," he murmured.

"You—you—have been drinking!"

The words were a breath. She was cold in this new terror.

"A little," he admitted, still lounging, still smiling. "This place got on my nerves to-night! I felt like a cart horse dragging a load of iron. Things look a bit rose-colored now, thanks to the count's old Madeira, and thanks still more to—you!"

As he stood up and came with graceful insolence toward her, Janet retreated backward, her eyes on him as she would have watched a dangerous dog. When she reached the chair over which her dressing gown lay, she picked it up and plunged her arms into it. All the time she watched him. She was no longer aware of her breath. The whole room was one big, soul-chilling fear.

Arthur laughed softly as she flung on the clinging, silk garment.

"One would suppose I'd never seen you *en déshabillé* before!" he said reprovingly, and lifting his brows in an imploring way. "Janet—you have such wonderful hair! As it billows over your shoulders, *chérie*, in a flame-colored torrent—"

She ventured a little closer to him, and asked, in a piercing whisper:

"Arthur! Arthur! Do you know what you're doing?"

"Yes," he answered, nodding, the light in his eyes hardening to a rigid gleam; "I'm trying to tell you that I'm sorry we ever broke loose from each other, Jane—*that I want to get back!* I love you—can't you see it?"

He tried to touch her. There was more panic than resentment or repulsion in the way that she struck down his hand.

"Don't say another word of that sort! Have you forgotten where we are?" She pointed past him into the shadows, toward the door. "If our voices are heard—if anything betrays that you have come to my room—do you know what will happen? We'll be disgraced. They'll turn us out."

The picture, even while her own words sketched it, became unbearable to her. She thought only of Hugh—of his gaze that had been so comprehen-

sive, so kind, turned cynical and cold. To be able to leave the château before such a thing could happen became a purpose that swept over her in a sort of frenzy. Her fear was not of Arthur's overtures toward sentiment; it was a hard, throbbing terror that Hugh might discover who she was, what Arthur was to her, why she was there—all the details of her fraud—before she could put between them the miles that would hide his changed face from her.

"They'll turn us out, I say," she repeated. "That's why I ask whether you know what you're doing?"

"Let's take the chance," he urged obstinately. "Just at this moment, I realize that *you* are the most important thing in the world!"

He tried to reach her again.

Her terror strengthening her, she eluded him, and stood on guard, cold and shivering like a half-snared bird that sees one chance of escape against fifty of capture.

"If you don't go out of this room this minute," she announced, in low, crisp tones, her lips almost shut, "I'll ring that bell, and every one in this house will know what you are."

"What *I* am? Is that all that's troubling you?" he mocked, while his shoulders gave a contemptuous twist. "Only what *I* am?"

"What *we* are—both of *us*! What *I* am—through you! They'll *know*. Now will you go?"

For answer, he sat down and arranged himself comfortably.

"Ring," he said, and yawned; "I'm waiting to see you do it."

Her hand, which had faltered toward the bell rope, faltered back.

"I'm waiting to see the face of the cross-examiner, Maxwell, when you present me as your 'legal, lawful'!" He blinked at her, his lips now a fixed sneer. "She won't do it!" he apostrophized the air in a mild, complaining tone. "She won't ring the bell when I ask her to, as a favor!"

Janet stood helpless. Her dread was so intense that it brought a feeling of blindness with it. She felt that if she

should relax her grip upon herself for a single second, she would fall senseless.

"I beg of you to go," she managed to say thickly.

She stood gripping the high mantel, her eyes shut. He could see the trembling tearing her with the force of a storm, and through the haze of drink upon his senses, he felt frightened; for a moment, his native caution quickened. She was not aware that he had risen until he was beside her, his fingers gripping her arm.

"All right," he said, in a guarded, comforting whisper. "Don't go under. I'm off in a moment."

But as she drew back and crossed the room, relief surging over her, he reached her.

"After you kiss me—once!"

He slipped his arm around her shoulders, and, feeling her shrinking muscles under the thin satin, his longings took on a frenzied determination.

"You must!" he whispered, and while she struggled with the weakness of one spent, he caught her to him sharply, bent her head back brutally, and kissed her in a fury that had both retaliation and triumph in it.

She felt a rage at her bodily weakness that made her an easy prisoner. When, breathless, she was able to twist herself from beneath the pressure of his lips, which were still seeking and insensate, her soul was sick at the taint that had been put upon her.

"You are not above even a hideous trick like this—a cheat all through!" she whispered defiantly.

"You are my wife, Jane," he pleaded, "and you're bewilderingly lovely. I've never stopped caring, darling—not really! Forgive me, this once. I only ask you to kiss me of your own will, and I'll go!"

Her loosened hair, like a soft silk flag, brushed his face. It acted like a spur—he seized it, wrapped it about his neck, and so drew her face closer to him. His strength now had a fearful quality, and Janet felt her senses swim. His burning, seeking lips were as au-

thoritative as destiny. Fight as she would, she was being conquered. She saw that he had lost all sense of his surroundings and of the necessity for circumspection. His face was a madman's. His desire was rage, and as cruel as the desire to kill.

While she beat him back, her fingers clutching at his throat, they came within reach of the bell again.

"Will you let me go?" she panted. "Or shall I ring the bell? I mean it—this time! Will you let me go?"

"You glorious devil!" he whispered, and a laugh that was infernal flashed over his distracted face. "You can't frighten me off, Janet. You've found your master. You're ice—but I'm going to make you flame! I'll make you love me—not only now—but afterward! I'm going to get you back. You're not a woman for a man to lose easily. Did you think so? Oh, did you think so?" he whispered, and with his pointed teeth showing greedily over his red under lip, he laughed at her as a moon-maddened faun might have laughed.

"Will you let me go?" Janet demanded again, in jolts, the tone like ice.

"Kiss me!" he demanded.

She flung out the arm that was free, and pulled at the bell-rope in such a frenzy that it snapped and fell upon their heads like the coils of a big snake.

"I've done it!" she exclaimed, in icy despair, as his arms fell away from her.

It was curious to see sanity return to Arthur. He was like a man struggling for breath after the surge of blinding billows. While he blinked and fought for composure, she was aware of the steady, stolid hatred of his eyes.

"There's only one thing to do," he said, moving toward the window at the head of her bed. "I'll clear out of here into the garden. After things have quieted and you're alone, you'll have to let me in this way again to get to my room. See that you do. I'll talk only business to you, then."

CHAPTER XII.

He slipped out, and Janet sat bent over, wiping her wet, exhausted face. Her mind was in a ferment, her thoughts befogged; she could plan nothing. She knew that the bell communicated with the maid's room, but whether the summons at such an hour would bring only her, or every one in the château, she could not determine. She sat waiting, every breath a pain, her listening eyes upon the door.

At last, the silence of the house was broken by a distant sound; then another a little nearer. Some one was coming. Janet started to her feet, and tried to find a defense, as one shivering gropes for a cloak. What should she say? How explain that frantic call for help? Now that she did not need it, every instinct was again keyed against possible exposure.

After an effort that was gigantic, she walked close to the door, just as a cautious knock sounded on it, and a discreet, but frightened, voice murmured:

"Mademoiselle—you rang—you—"

Janet opened the door, and faced the maid, the butler, and the secretary. All were in their night clothes, with shawls and coats flung over them. A medley of questions in subdued, cautious voices poured upon her. Something had frightened her? What was it? Should they call the others? Should they call Monsieur Langstreet and Monsieur Maxwell? Was it a thief—or a ghost?"

Janet was so relieved to see only the servants and the secretary that she invited them to enter.

"I'm so sorry," she faltered. "I was frightened. I—I—thought some one was in the room—but the sound came from the chimney. I—I—only realized that after I had rung. I—"

Her voice died away vaguely, unable to support further the house of lies.

"Sound in the chimney? Ah, *oui!*" the butler exclaimed. "That is often of terrible horror—that sound! It is from the gulls as they fight with the swallows. Often I have seen dead birds come tumbling down the shaft."

He rushed to the big hearth, and

peered up. At the moment, as if to corroborate Janet's simple explanation, the wind made a guttering cry, and soot clattered to the dying embers.

The excited servants nodded in satisfaction. This was all. The young lady had been alarmed by the rising storm, which certainly did make eerie lamentations in the chimney. But, before leaving, the secretary, to assure her, searched the room. He lifted bed curtains and window curtains to show Janet how absolutely empty the place was of every presence, ghostly or material, other than their own selves.

She played her part of a frightened woman being won back to confidence, and soon they stole away. Silence fell over the house again. Still Janet stood in the room, moving her head slowly as she looked about, like one watchful in a strange place. She had been shaken to the very center of her soul. The treachery of Arthur's visit to her—the insult of his efforts to conquer her to his drink-inflamed will—had filled her not only with an intensified loathing of him, but with an invincible determination to thwart his robbery of the countess at once, and end her own association with him absolutely and ultimately that night.

A half hour was heavily ticked away by the big clock in the corner before she thought it safe to go to the window that opened onto the garden steps. She carried the candle, and, after waving it slightly, drew back. On the farther side of the heavy oval table, she waited for Arthur to enter.

He came, a cigarette between his lips, his collar turned up to his ears. He was fully sobered and very white. The dews had matted his fair hair above his dark, bright eyes. The hatred of her had gone from his gaze; it held his usual half-amused audacity.

"Alone?" he asked, nodding with satisfaction; and then he faced her, his hands on his hips. "I want to beg your pardon, my dear Janet. I shouldn't have made love to you—without permission. It wasn't playing the game. Believe me, I didn't come here with that idea. But you were so distract-

ingly pretty that I lost my head. Your fault, you see. Of course! Why, even now, as you stand there, with the purple of that gown blazing on your white face, with your red hair, and your eyes as blue as the sea at Capri, upon my soul—you tempt me all over again! But I'll resist you. I promise to be sane and obedient, although you are such a delectable sweetmeat!"

Janet's look, and the words that followed it, brushed him and his explanations aside as crumbs are brushed from a table.

"It would be safer to have you go at once," she said, in a whisper that contained no feeling of any kind; "but, before you sleep, I want you to know just what I intend to do. I am leaving this place to-morrow morning."

He lifted his brows.

"Are you?" he murmured, like one who hears a pleasantry that interests only slightly.

"And I advise *you* to go, too—"

"With you?" he asked, a pretended ecstasy in the words, his eyes widening and then narrowing.

"I advise you to leave here while I give you the chance—you to go your way—and I mine," Janet went on. "I am warning you," she added, her sweet face hardening. "I don't want to see harm come to you, if it's possible to avoid it. So I tell you to go—to-morrow!"

"Why should I? If you don't mind telling me."

"Before I leave, I mean to put these people on their guard. If you stay, you'll be arrested."

"You don't mean this," he said quietly.

"I do. As surely as that we were both born, and must both die one day—I mean it," she answered, and, looking into her steadily darkening eyes, he knew that she spoke the truth.

"I see." For a second, he stood stroking his lips in thought; then he added, with a change of tone that was startling—velvet becoming iron: "I see! Well, it's about time that you knew exactly where you stand. Janet," he asked seriously, "do you want to

die?" As she looked at him in confusion, he went on: "I am speaking to you now more honestly than I ever have in all my life. If you don't want to die, you won't do what you plan. Try to leave this place to-morrow, and your life will be taken, just as surely as you stand there—but not by me."

"Just what do you mean?"

"Did you suppose that we were alone in this scheme? Not from the very first!" he said, leaning at ease against the mantel, and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "But since we came here, and the game has grown to big proportions, there are at least fourteen men interested in what we pull off here. They are at Nantes, at Chanteynay. There isn't a moment when I can't get into communication with two or three of them. Try to leave this place, knowing what you do, and inimical to the interests of my friends, and I tell you they would kill you—why?"—and he shrugged—"they'd kill you exactly as they would a mad dog bent on biting them. Without a second's hesitation, my dear, they'd snuff you out. I mean this. You came into this business with me. There's nothing for you to do but play your part to the end. You can refuse any share of the haul, if you choose, if you wish to be a conscientious fool—but you're here—and you've got to stay here and see me through as you promised. If you don't—well, you die!"

Her feeling of soiuvre amounted to sickness. But, besides this, she had as he spoke a sense of dark, ruthless things—things that staggered her with a horror of the unknown.

All about her, forming a net, were men, foes of society, social marauders, pirates, who made a business of crime and specialized in murder. And Arthur—this suave, smiling Arthur, with the manners of a gentleman, with the velvet voice, and the delicate beauty of a poet—was one of them! She felt a cold shadow creeping around her. Life became suddenly very precious, very sweet. Yes, even though the future was one big, harrowing question, she wanted that future! The gaunt, cold

nothingness called death seemed trying to embrace her, and instinctively, with every throb of her young, breathing body, she beat it off.

"Now, what you'll *really* do is this," Arthur continued amiably, as he saw her sink, without speaking, into a chair. "You'll get ready to leave here on Christmas night—not before. Pack your bag to-morrow, and give it to me."

She looked up, then, hope in her revived face.

"Then you give up the idea of getting the jewels?"

"Not a bit of it. I'll get them Christmas night."

"But you can't. You don't know where they are."

He smiled.

"Do you?"

"No!" she answered promptly, her teeth fairly clicking on the lie.

He strolled nearer.

"Then let me enlighten you."

While dismay numbed her, she listened to his next words. They seemed to come to her out of a fog:

"Behind the Flemish portrait, at the foot of the countess' bed, there is a safe set in the wall, behind the brocade-covered panel. It is opened by a secret process, and I don't know what it is. I shan't bother about that. It can be easily forced."

She tried to ask how he had found this out, but the first word was barely trembling on her lips when he answered her.

"All women are not as icy to me as you are, my dear. I made Katia talk," he said, and chuckled silently.

"Katia?"

The word had enlightenment in it. The picture of the dark-eyed, sad-faced Russian woman, as she had seen her that afternoon receiving the book from the countess' hands to carry it to Arthur—the strange, flickering light in her unsteady gaze, her quick breath, the nervous excitement that swept out from her like a breath—Janet recalled them all now. How stupid she had been! She might have known that this would have been a move of Arthur's. Much

of whatever he had had out of life had come from the fascination that he so easily exerted over all sorts of women. Of course, to have let Katia escape him would have been ignoring a big chance.

"Then she knows why you're here? She betrayed her mistress to you. What sort of promise have you made her to have gained so much from her?"

Arthur looked sadly at her, and shook his head.

"I'm afraid, my love, you'd never be good at this sort of business, which requires as much lightness as a sleight-of-hand trick. On second thoughts, you're right to stick to cumbersome honesty. You'd never earn your salt by your wits." He condescended to explain. "I merely kissed Katia quite a lot—then I gained her confidence—confidences about herself that were dreadfully boring, to tell you the truth—then confidences about her mistress and her life here. When I, very innocently and with my most childlike, wide-eyed expression, said that I thought that the countess was foolish to keep so much jewelry about unless she had a good, sound, iron safe, Katia dripped the truth bit by bit. I didn't learn all in one talk, nor with one kiss—don't imagine it. But she's a warm-hearted, soul-starved creature! There's a flood of love there for some man to win, poor soul! I told her that she had beautiful eyes—as, by the way, she has—and she told me, by degrees, just where the jewels were put away at night. You see?"

He rippled out these disclosures without a touch of shame—just as another man would tell of some clever business deal in an office or over a counter. If the scales had not fallen from Janet's eyes on that never-to-be-forgotten day in Rome, these glib, shameless phrases, descriptive of his trade upon a servant's infatuation, would have brought her clear vision.

He had come very close to her. Their talk was almost in soundless whispers. She seemed to be listening with only half of herself to what he was saying to her; the other half was groping for a way out—for a thread of light by which

she might safely escape from the labyrinth encompassing her.

"There are so many of us in this now," he whispered, "that we can pull it off safely—the stuff will be divided and sold in twenty different places. On Christmas night, when the old lady gives the fool costume dinner she talked about with me this evening, I'll be able to put the sleeping herb I told you of into the *cafetière* before it's brought to the table. Don't you drink the coffee. And, of course, I shan't. After the countess is in her room, and safely in bed—*doped*—your part begins. All I want you to do is to see that I get in. I'll get the safe open. You keep by the bed, and if she shows signs of coming from under the dose, you'll gently wave a little sponge that I'll give you close to her nostrils, and she'll sink into the most delicious slumber.

"All this time our portmanteaux will be waiting for us with Tony Ricet and two others in a motor, just this side of the cliffs. I get the stuff—we come out of the countess' room into this, down to the garden by those steps, and steal away. No one will be fit to ask a question as to what's happened until we've been gone about eight or nine hours. All our tracks will be easily covered. We will leave the motor at Chantenay, and take to a boat, which will be waiting on the Loire—thence to the sea. It will be the cleanest get-away of my career."

He paused, looked into her lifted, pallid face, and smiled.

"All this time you may wonder how I've got rid of Katia. Maybe you think she will be difficult, hanging about, not having had a draft of the specially prepared coffee. I'll attend to Katia. She will be waiting for me at the station at Nantes, ready to leave for America, with me. Poor Katia! I hate to do it—but I have to. And she can't understand how I can love her so much when the whole world is mine to choose from—" He broke off, his lip curling in a one-sided way. "You know, I am quoting Katia when I say this! She is dazed—but she is going to seize her great good luck blindly. She thinks

that, owing to the difference in our stations, I have preferred a new country in which to begin our lives together."

Before the steady contempt of Janet's eyes, he had the grace to flinch a little.

"Oh, wise, young judge!" he quoted. "You look as if you were passing sentence upon me."

"I did that years ago," she answered quietly, as she stood up, "but the sentence was too light. A man can be a big and merciless scoundrel without being a cheap cur. I thought you the one. I find you the other."

A stain of color wavered in the fine skin along his delicate cheek.

"If words had not ceased long ago to hurt me, yours would hurt. Unfortunately, I came into life with the tastes of a prince and the resources of a chimney sweep. I can't deny that, in the process of trying to reconcile the two, I have not improved."

She sat with her hands clasped upon the table, looking ahead.

"You'd better go now," she said, in a hard, inexpressive voice.

"I'd suggest that you first go out, with the candle. Go down to the library, as if for a book. See if the coast is clear. I'd rather spend the night behind your window curtains than risk being seen leaving here."

Without resistance, she obeyed him. Her heart was like a stone as she crept through the dark, still spaces of the house, the wavering light doing fantastic things to her staring face. She returned, and set the candle down. He was waiting, his boots in his hand.

"You can go without any danger," she said, without meeting his eyes.

"All right." He moved a little way and looked back at her over his shoulder. "You quite understand the whole plan for Christmas night?"

"Quite."

"And you'll see it through? In fact, you'll have to. It will be your only way for clearing out of here as you are so keen on doing. But—you give your promise?"

"Yes," she said, lying easily, knowing that she was lying, and in a tormented, agonized way rejoicing in it.

He left her then. She did not stir from the seat by the table until the dawn made its ghostly entry. Her face had the look of a child grown old through premature misery—but decision filled her. She saw a way of escaping the retaliation of the disappointed thieves, and yet of saving the countess' jewels. The duplicity inherited to some extent by every woman from the first woman of the Garden, which all the centuries since have perfected into that delicate, feminine artifice that makes, when necessary, a most formidable weapon for defense, Janet now saw a way of using in the carrying out of a purpose. She meant to make a cat's-paw of Arthur and his friends in order to save herself—at the same time saving the jewels from their hands, which, like vultures' claws, were already closing upon them.

CHAPTER XIII.

The next day, as if in deliberate preparation for Christmas, brought the first frost—an invigorating, glittering day, with winking sunshine and sparkling skies.

There was an unusually cheery bustle of life in the château. With the air cleared of the dolor of the countess' illness, with the costume dinner beckoning, and the great holiday distilling its never-fading flavor of home cheer and human good will, the atmosphere of the great house glowed with a sort of benignity that would have been precious food to Janet's spirit but for the thoughts that rasped upon those secret strings that gave out terror, sorrow, desperation, and farewell.

They were all at the late breakfast, which was served in the intimacy of the morning room. The wood blaze leaped, cackling like a garrulous Brittany crone. Covered silver dishes, placed in readiness on the sideboard, simmered over amethyst-tinted flames. The sunlight poured through primrose-colored curtains at the north windows. Freshly cut flowers trailed from a big, shallow silver dish in the center of the table.

Janet was as calm as if some nar-

cotic had strapped her senses. Her sleepless night had left her face of a blazing pallor, and her eyes so much darker than their usual sea blue that they suggested ink splashes upon white paper. She bowed coldly to Arthur when they met. He gave her a winged glance of warning, and spoke with exaggerated good humor to her. Her only answer was another chill inclination of the head. The others seemed all absorbed in their plans for the remainder of the day.

As breakfast progressed, these plans played into Janet's hands. Her burning desire was to be able to get to Nantes without mentioning that she was going there. Above all, she wanted to evade Arthur. The only thing that promised her success was some chance that would take him from the château so that, for a few hours, she might be unobserved. There was, therefore, a deep thrill in her heart as she heard the count planning a motor ride down the coast with his secretary, to distribute the Christmas gifts that he always gave to the fishing folk.

"You'll come with me," he nodded to Arthur. "I'm incognito here, as yet, so you can get out of the car, make a few speeches to the crowd, and talk to the old priest. Eh, *mon vieux*? You don't mind? You won't find me boring?"

Janet saw, by the faint flicker of Arthur's eyelids and a furtive movement of his jaw, how inwardly infuriating this program was to him. He could, however, only accept, his lips smiling. But his dull gaze glued itself to hers with the effect of a trailing thing—she felt as if in that secret, telegraphic glance a slug had crawled across her flesh.

Hugh was to give a good part of the day to his own affairs—business, and personal letters, and the like. The countess engaged Janet to help Katia in the selection of costumes for herself and the men. The count took possession of Arthur to discuss the gifts for the fishermen. So the morning was arranged for, and so it passed.

After some hours spent with Katia

in diving into trunks and dragging out old brocades smelling of rose leaves, plumed hats, velvet-scabbarded swords, and yellowed linens as fine as cobwebs, Janet went to her own room. She had to go to it as to a refuge—to breathe. Once the door was closed, her real, but imprisoned, self showed in her wild eyes and clutching hands. Arthur's glances, as full of meaning as naked blades, and the Russian maid's badly concealed agitation while working with her at the trunks, had seemed to put quicksilver into Janet's blood. She felt the air of the house vibrating with the impending crime. She must do what she had planned to do, and quickly. There was not a moment to be lost.

Following this resolve, she put on her heaviest coat and a close hat with a veil. After reaching the countess' door and knocking, she stood waiting for the call to enter, trying to push the gloves on her cold, shaking hands.

Since coming to The Gulls, it had become second nature to her to gauge every sound and try to interpret its exact meaning—such small things might prove to her signals of danger! So she stood suddenly rigid, one big, anxious question filling her, as she heard beyond the closed door the murmur of a discreetly guarded conversation—Hugh's voice and the countess'. There was a pause before the lock was clicked back and the door was opened. She was looking up into Hugh's face.

Her fright, rooted in her own consciousness of guilt, which had made her see a possible menace to herself in this whispered talk behind a locked door, wavered in the light of Hugh's smile.

"Come in," he said cheerfully, "if you want to see something lovely."

She entered, and, with a feeling of complete relief, so intense that it was weakening, she saw the countess sitting before her table, poring over an oblong leather case lined with apple-green velvet and holding a string of emeralds. The Christmas good humor still irradiated her hard, made-up face. She half lifted the wondrous green string from the box, and let it trickle like drops from her fingers.

"I am stealing a peep at my husband's gift to me," she said archly to Janet. "He would be like a thundercloud if he knew that I had seen it!"

So nothing more ominous than the count's Christmas present to his wife had made her picture the ragged teeth of a set trap!

"Heavens!" the countess continued, with a shivering laugh and a shrug. "I never get a new jewel now without thinking of those highwaymen who held me up on the way to Paris. If they knew!" She held her hands above her head in make-believe horror. "Are you going out?" she broke off, observing that Janet had on her outdoor things.

"I came to say, madame la comtesse, that if you did not need me, I'd go for a walk," Janet answered.

"Go, certainly. You must have a headache from bending over those stuffy trunks!"

Hugh, who had gone to the door, paused there.

"Do you care for a comrade on the jaunt, Miss Eustis? Or would you rather be alone?"

Her deep, soft eyes gave him a beseeching look. The color flickered nervously into her white cheeks.

"I'm feeling a little out of sorts. Please"—and she smiled—"I'd rather be alone to-day, and walk off my cloudy mood."

"Christmas brings fancies—dark enough sometimes," the countess said, as Hugh disappeared. "Even I, who have so much, have a habit of recalling the faces of those who made my Christmases bright in my childhood—alas, faces lost forever!" After uttering these words, she pressed her hands to her cheeks with an affected, little cry: "Oh, go away, Miss Eustis! If I get the blues, I'll look like a fright to-night! Go for your tramp—but send Katia to me first."

Janet found Katia on one of the landings, her arms filled with a heap of the countess' finery. She was climbing the stairs very slowly. Arthur, dressed for the motor, was just behind her. A faint sound of their whispers broke the quiet. But had Janet not been initiated,

she would not have found the closeness of the pair suspicious, for Katia was not looking at Arthur, and he appeared to be busy with his gloves.

She delivered the countess' message to the maid, and was hurrying to her own room, nervously anxious to avoid another word with Arthur, when she heard him say in the tone of a considerate and courteous friend:

"Don't go, Miss Eustis. You're not looking well to-day. Can't you sleep at the château?"

He was very close to her.

Katia had disappeared. They two stood alone. Janet permitted her turbulent heart to speak in a long, exasperated gaze.

"What's the matter—dearest?" he asked, in the faintest whisper, his lip curling.

"You seemed to feel yourself in terrible danger—yesterday—when we talked in the library," she said, in an angry spurt. "Yet you hang on here! Why? Why not clear out to-day? Isn't waiting—a risk—a terrible risk?"

"I did have a scare, but it has blown over." He moved from her circumspectly, and, seeing the secretary coming toward them, began to laugh, as if at a jest that had passed between them. "Don't worry that beautiful head—we'll get away!" He laughed again, but his teeth were set. "We'll go with hands full and hearts gay—by the Lord, we will!"

For the first time, he became aware that she wore her outdoor things. He wanted to ask where she was going—wanted to insist that she stay around the château and use her eyes and ears to the very best advantage—wanted to remind her that it was for such work that she had been hired. But the secretary, who had come to say that the motor was ready, stood beside them. Arthur could make his wishes known only in a covert way.

"Don't go far, Miss Eustis!" he exclaimed. "Really—I advise you! The darkness comes early. Don't go far!"

Without other reply than a twist of her shoulder and a nod, Janet hurried

away. She did not go to her own room. She went no farther than a window that gave on the driveway. Her burning hope was that the motor would turn to the right—the opposite direction to Nantes.

Though only five minutes passed, it seemed long before she heard the pumping of the engines. She held her breath. If the motor rolled to the right, she would take it as a hopeful omen that her plans would carry. As eagerly as a child following a pantomime, but with a heart that seemed a quivering bubble of pain, she watched, her head craned forward.

The motor left the drive, and rolled away to the right.

"I will succeed!" she exulted, a thrill of joy mingling with the trembling and fear that had made their home with her. "All this will be as if it had never been. It will pass like a dream, a fearful dream!"

She would not dwell on Hugh, who had turned part of that fearful dream into ecstatic visioning. He must be forgotten with all that was "sad and mad and bad." No; she *dare* not think of Hugh!

CHAPTER XIV.

At last, she was out under the sky—alone—free! While within sight of the château, she walked at a leisurely gait. But as soon as a hilly bit of forest rose like a rampart between her sight and its metal-gray angles, she broke into a run. All around her lay the lovely Breton landscape. Frost glimmered like patches of isinglass on the stripped tree trunks and low stone walls. She seemed alone in a world newly washed and polished to a glow. Here she need not mask the suspense of her strained heart, nor the intensity of her purpose. The most vital issue of her life hung upon her getting the early-afternoon train into Nantes, and getting it without any one at the château knowing that she had done so.

But a cold thought brought her almost to a standstill. It was true that she seemed alone, that nowhere on the road

curving back and before her in slack, serpentine lines was there a living thing. And yet—was her security real? She remembered what Arthur had said of the men who were to be his partners in disposing of the château's splendid loot. What was more likely than that, unseen by her, they watched all who came and went along these roads?

She began to walk soberly again. Every crackle of frostbitten branch, every angle of wall or wood that could hide a spy, sent a faintness over her.

By the time the small country station came into sight, her heart was dry and burning from secret terror, and made fluttering pulsations in her throat. She went into the small waiting room, sat down in the most sheltered corner, and wiped the cold moisture from her face. Here, after a few moments, she became more assured. Nothing had happened. She had apparently gained the station without being seen by any one but the man who sold the tickets.

No one came in before the arrival of the train but an old fisherman with a creel of fish; that he was what he seemed to be, and not an enemy in masquerade, was certain, for only a lifetime on the sea could have achieved that burned-amber and leathery skin with spider's-web wrinkles spread on the cheeks, the deep, soaked-in smell of salt and brine that came from him, and those happy, childlike, but sun-faded, eyes. He went into the third-class section, and Janet into the first. The toy-like locomotive gave out its fussy, falsetto shriek, and the cars moved. No one else had boarded the train.

Nantes! That old, old town! Janet had first read of it in school days in relation to the famous Edict. She had never imagined that she would one day walk its curious, Old World streets—still less that, as she hurried along them, her mind and body would be so obsessed by the fear of the hunted that she would hardly be aware of the winking, winding Loire; of the little islands over which the town had spread; of the small bridges, the glowering old castle, the cathedral that conjured up the medieval days when it had made history.

Janet scarcely saw them. She kept her veil down and walked quickly, looking to right and left with a glance that searched.

The town was sedately roused by the same day-before-Christmas magnetism that was turning London, New York, and Paris into frenzied market places. The twisting streets were well peopled. Drivers were making snapping music with their long whips; venders were selling plaster images, artificial-flower and evergreen wreaths, jumping jacks, dried seaweed, holly, illuminated calendars, blessed rosaries, gingerbread, and balloons. Janet passed among them all with unnoting gaze.

Veiled though she was, she attracted attention. Sober-looking men of the distinctly French provincial type, passing her, knew that she was a stranger to the town. Her lightsome grace of walk, the beauty of her flaming hair, the suggestion of troubled blue eyes and warm, red mouth seen through the black chiffon veil, brought admiring and questioning exclamations, often, after the enthusiastic Latin habit, uttered aloud:

"Mais elle est jolie, ça!" a middle-aged notary murmured, as Janet swept by him.

She heard this, and more like it, as she continued on her curious mission:

"A foreigner—American! Oh, a pretty girl, I agree with you!"

The admiration gave her a feeling of pain and wistfulness. For one flashing, bitter moment, she longed to be really only a pretty and carefree girl, walking for the first time along those old and curious streets, her heart an innocent one, thrilling at the passing praise of men! The thought died as it came. The urgency of her quest consumed her.

When she reached the streets with shops, she walked more slowly, and began entering them one after another, asking in each if there was a typewriter in the place that she would be allowed to use for a few moments. "No," and "No," came blankly to her again and again. Some of the shops were so antiquated, their owners so aged, that they were only vaguely aware of what she

meant, and looked at her as they might at a mild lunatic.

"But no, mademoiselle. But certainly not—such a thing! Try in the Passage Pommeraye. It is bigger there. Who knows? Eh, who knows, indeed?"

At last, in a small paper factory between a flour mill and a garage, she found one. In the world of typewriters it would have been classed as an undesirable citizen, "lame, halt, and blind," but it served her purpose. The young Frenchman in charge of the office gave her a ready and an excited permission to make use of it. He politely left her alone, but as she ticked away, he re-entered from time to time, as if on business errands. In reality, it was that he might have stolen looks at the pale and lovely stranger with such pleading, deep-blue eyes as he had never before seen, except in one of the angels' faces in the loveliest of the cathedral windows.

Janet, seated at the machine, tried to shut out her surroundings and to focus her attention wholly on the lines that she had to write. Even so, the machine was so rickety that she made numerous mistakes. Several times she found it necessary to strip the page from the cylinder, tear it up, and start again. After a full half hour, the task was done. The purpose that had brought her to Nantes—a message of warning to the Comte Lamballieu—was clearly written:

MONSIEUR LE COMTE: When you receive this note, do at once what the writer of it advises. There is a plot afoot to rob you. By a curious series of events, some of the details became known to one who has determined to give you this chance to outwit the thieves. Your wife's jewels are, of course, the magnet. There is a gang in Nantes who know where they are kept and have made plans to secure them. Place them in another hiding place—no matter where—the most ordinary hole or corner will do—but take them from where they are at present. If you do not heed this, you will lose them. All that you have to do is to place the jewels in some other hiding place, letting no one but yourself and your wife know of the change. Act upon this warning at once. A stranger, who has discovered the ingeniously constructed plot of the thieves, and yet who, for safety, must remain incognito, sends it to you.

The envelope was addressed to the count.

As Janet read these lines, she felt redeemed. She recalled Arthur's words to her little more than an hour before:

"We'll go with hands full and hearts gay—by the Lord, we will!"

"No!" rang through her brain in answer—a triumphant denial, as she set her lips. "You'll find that you've been cheated, but too late for you to save the situation. So late, indeed, that you'll be glad to steal out like a beaten cur and get to safety as fast as you can. And you'll go with empty hands, my clever Arthur—*empty hands!*"

The young Frenchman would take no pay for permitting the use of the machine. Janet felt such gratitude to him that, as she looked into his glowing young face, her heart warmed.

"Then please let me shake hands with you for this kindness." And the boy agreed, his fingers trembling. "You have helped me very much," she added, with a quivering wistfulness.

"I am glad it could be so, mademoiselle," he returned. "And I wish you a very happy Christmas!"

"It will be a happy Christmas—now," she replied, going to the door, and the quiet words held a fierce thrill. "You have been very, very good."

She went away. The boy waited until she had passed the low, dusty window, then flew to the door and opened it. He watched her hurrying with her light, free step down the narrow street between the high, drab houses whose roofs seemed to meet—watched until her fluttering skirt and the long ends of her filmy veil had vanished around the first corner. When he came back to the office, it seemed dark; she had taken the sunshine with her. The young clerk was romantic. He sat down before the typewriter just because *she* had sat there, and he wondered why, when such a vision from his dreams had entered his life, she had to pass out of it almost as soon as she came.

"It is just like the ocean sending up little sticks to lie upon the shore—they touch—and then another wave comes and they are swept apart forever. ¶

will never see that beautiful stranger again."

As he dreamed, he was gazing, without knowing it, at several of the sheets of paper that Janet, in her effort to write the letter, had torn up. Color leaped into his cheek; his eyes brightened; he thought of romances that he had read in which some little chance thing brought two lives together. Only vaguely aware of the dishonor of the act, he brought up a handful of the torn scraps from the wastebasket, and, retreating to the privacy of the big desk, whose back rose like a screen between the wall and the door, he set himself to patch the scraps together.

As they took form before him, his eyes dilated.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he murmured.

Here was romance, indeed!

MONSIEUR LE COMTE: When you receive this note, do at once what the writer advises. There is a plot afoot to rob you—

There were several mistakes in this which accounted for its discarding. He pieced out another fragment, which he added to the first:

There is a gang in Nantes—

And then later:

Act upon this warning at once. A stranger who has discovered—

The boy sat, chilled and quivering. To think that the beautiful visitor, whose handclasp had been so softly sincere, had written these ominous words! Thieves—and a planned crime—and a gang in Nantes—and a pretty, exquisite woman sending some count a warning of it! Ah, the whole event was like one of the serials in the illustrated weekly paper! For the first time, the romance that he had found in them had touched his own gray and toneless life.

He was still bent over the fragments of paper, which he had plastered to make a sequence, when the door opened. Looking around the corner of the desk, he saw a grave-eyed priest. He half dragged a newspaper over his find, and rose respectfully. The thought that the priest was making a round of the business places to get Christmas donations ambled easily through his mind, but was

fairly catapulted out of it by the first words he heard:

"A young lady has just left you?"

"Yes, my father," the boy answered, in wonder, his mouth remaining open.

"What errand brought her here? You may safely tell me."

There was a quiet dignity about the speaker that commanded confidence.

"She wrote a letter upon the typing machine, my father."

"She wrote a letter?" the priest repeated slowly and thoughtfully, and he looked sharply at the paper on the desk. "I would give a great deal to know what that young lady wrote. If, by any chance, she left any scraps of writing behind her—"

"But if she did, I ought not to let you know," the boy said quickly, in the tone of a champion. "It would not be fair to her, my father. It might do her harm—"

"I am her friend." The priest laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and looked long and earnestly into his eyes—a look that he never forgot. "I am a friend who would give his right hand to help her. She is in trouble, I know. Show me, if you can, something of what she wrote. Upon my honor, I am asking for her good!"

When a priest said this, who could doubt it? Yet it was with a curious feeling of unwillingness that the young clerk surrendered the paper to the hand held out so eagerly for it—a hand that trembled in a hard, controlled way, as if the heart of the man was deeply stirred.

Alas, now that the secret was no longer his, the boy felt as if some ineffable, magic cord that bound him to the delectable Unknown had snapped! A shadowy desolation went over him as he watched the priest poring over the printed words. He noted that the other had turned from him as he read, and that his face was hidden. Just what sort of agitation was filling him was not evident, but feeling of some sort pulsed in him like a storm. His big shoulders quivered, his head gave short, convulsive nods. When he turned to

go, the boy saw that his mouth was set and very pale, but he smiled.

"Thank you for what you have done. In the meantime, say nothing to any one. I emphasize this! Say *nothing*, if you would help the stranger who wrote what must seem bewildering to you. Thank you again, my son, and a happy Christmas!"

The priest passed the dusty window. The boy, as before, hurried to it, and watched him down the street. The fluttering skirt and the big, scoop-shaped hat remained in sight only until the first corner, where they vanished as had his first visitor. The street was empty, the office, when the clerk returned to it, dolefully silent. Nothing was left of the afternoon's little romance—not even a scrap of paper! He sat down at the desk again, his cheeks pressed into the cups of his palms, and hated life, which was so unsatisfying compared to the serials in the illustrated weekly papers. Dolefully he brushed his soft, felt hat, and went home.

If, instead of doing this, some occult guardianship had led his steps to the post office, he would have seen again the visitor who had sent the rose light of romance wavering for a moment across his colorless life. Janet's intention in going there had been to post her letter to the château. But when she stood in the dusty, crowded room, a feeling of uncertainty took her suddenly by the throat. If sent through the mails, would it reach The Gulls before to-morrow night? If not, her gigantic attempt at reparation would have been thrown away.

She found herself last on the line, as she waited, the letter grasped in her hand within her muff. What should she do? It seemed unsafe even to inquire about the probability of a letter reaching the château, for if some chance allowed the robbery to come off successfully, it would probably be remembered that she, a stranger, had made this inquiry the day before the crime.

While she stood in doubt, the clerk was called to a few yards' distance to confer with another employee over some disputed matter. She leaned weakly

against the small window. It was then that an excited thought came, faintly at first, then strenuously, into life. She gave a quick glance around, her heart-beats fairly shaking her body, and saw that just for the moment she was alone and unwatched. Quickly—more quickly even than the thought—she thrust the letter up on the ledge, lifted the ink stamp, which lay close to her hand, struck at the right-hand corner of the letter, and then pulled it back. After another watchful glance, she saw that there was chance for further use of the stamp. She seized it again and struck twice, at random, at the back of the envelope.

When the clerk returned, she was ghastly pale, ice cold, but apparently quiet. Her hand in her muff was gripping the letter. To the clerk's polite inquiry as to what she wanted, she managed to ask for some stamps. It seemed incredible to her that a moment later she was again in the radiant, frosty air and hurrying for the train.

When she found herself alone in the compartment, she finished her work. She affixed the stamp close to the first postmark, which showed the word "Nantes" clearly; those on the back she deliberately blurred with her gloved thumb—they would pass for the marks of the local post office.

She had a dim idea of having heard somewhere that what she had done was an offense under the law, perhaps a serious one. The thought made her feel again the hard tremors of nervousness that had almost conquered her as she had waited by the post-office window. But this was followed by the most thrilling exultation. She had come through this supreme experience safely. Everything had conspired to help her. After smoothing the letter so that the creases left by the clutch of her fingers were erased, she leaned her head back against the bulging cushions, and for the first time that day really rested.

The carrying out of her purpose had cleansed her in her own sight. She could dare to think of Hugh now. Her farewell to him was without the black despair that had been haunting her. She

and Arthur would leave as had been planned. But the jewels would remain at the Château of The Gulls.

She watched her chance. An hour before dinner, the footman appeared from the post office, carrying the mail bag. Janet, from a curtained corner of the hall, watched him pour the contents on a table. When this was done, she came to him, the letter that she had carried from Nantes hidden in the soft, silk folds of her blouse.

"There's a letter for me, Etienne?" she asked, bending over.

"I have not sorted them yet, mademoiselle."

"Oh, there must be one!" And she lifted a few at random. As they shuffled through her fingers, and while the footman searched the others, she thrust the prepared letter among those that she held.

"There's nothing here, mademoiselle," said the footman.

"And there's nothing here," said Janet, her tone disappointed. "Curious! I expected a Christmas letter."

She shrugged philosophically, and moved away from his sympathetic eyes.

A quarter of an hour later, the count had read the warning. And in still another ten minutes the heads of the countess and Hugh were bent with his own over it.

CHAPTER XV.

It was with a new and intense expectation that Janet went down to breakfast on Christmas morning. The letter had been read—the bomb had been exploded. What would be the result? Would the danger threatening be spoken of before Arthur and her? Or would the matter be treated as one of very private, family importance?

If the first—and Arthur was thereby warned—he would decide to arrange a quiet departure from the château the day after Christmas or later, pretending to have been called to Paris on business; she would follow as soon as she possibly could without arousing suspicion. But if the second condition prevailed, and they were shut out from

the family's confidence, Arthur would, of course, attempt to carry through his plan, find himself foiled, and as quickly as possible decamp to safety, but empty-handed. In that case, to prevent him from discovering the ruse by which she had warned the count, she would have to appear to play the game under his direction, and would be forced to a vanquished exit with him at dead of night.

One condition gave her the chance of hiding the fact that she had been in the plot to rob the château. The other must needs leave her, after her escape, unmasked to them all—unmasked to Hugh. Never had she known a longing as keen as the one that dominated her when she entered the morning room—that she and Arthur be told of the plot to rob, so that he would have to recognize failure, throw down his cards, and concentrate every scintilla of subterfuge and resource in effecting a gradual and wholly unsuspicious withdrawal from the château.

"Which is it to be?"

Body and mind were throbbing to this question as she went in.

Hugh was standing at the hearth reading a Paris paper. He looked over it with a smile of greeting.

"All good wishes to you, Miss Eustis, this glorious morning!"

Her heart was saying, "Of course, he knows. Yes, he knows," but she spoke a phrase of thanks and gave him a return of her good will.

As she sat close to the wood fire, her eyes traveled about the beautiful room. With its leaping blaze and its winking silver, filled with the perfume of the hothouse roses on the table, and with the scent of pine from the ropes and branches of evergreen that decorated it everywhere, it became etched on her brain as a memory that would help to color the gray days awaiting her in dull, cold corners of the world.

Perhaps by to-morrow night this room would be like a spot that had been visited by some other self, gone forever from her knowledge. At the best, in a few days or a week, it would be like a

consoling dream from which she had awakened, shivering. Ah, let her gaze at it now—every bit of it—every smallest, lovely thing! Wanderer, vagabond, as she was soon to be, perhaps smirched forever as a cheat in the eyes of this man who was now looking at her with all the tenderness that he had been forbidden to speak showing in his eyes—let her write its beauty enduringly on her mind, so that later she might recall it with the sad ecstasy born of "remembering happier things."

"You are troubled?" she heard Hugh say, in the faintest voice.

She was startled to find that her eyes were burning and wet. As there was no use in denying that a fit of weeping had seized her, she looked at him recklessly and laughed through the tears.

"Holidays and anniversaries—well, you know how they affect some people!" she said, with a bitter shrug.

"They make one take a reckoning of life," Hugh answered, with the sympathetic quality in his voice that always pulled at her heart. "And, alas—the reckoning does not always bring the total we hoped for! Isn't that so?"

"They are spades," she said, in a low, burning tone, "that open old graves, and turn the first sods of new ones!" She sprang up, as Arthur's laugh sounded from beyond the portières. "But I did not mean to wear my heart on my sleeve this way," she added hurriedly. "In fact, I mean to try to be happy to-day—if I never am again in all my life!"

She stood gripping the back of one of the high chairs, watching Arthur as he gayly held up the thick velvet at the door for the countess to enter. The count came after her more slowly. And he was followed by a footman bearing an armful of prettily tied packages.

In the stress of her thoughts, as the days had dragged by at the château. Janet had been unmindful of either giving or receiving gifts. Of course, in her position of secretary, nothing but trifles would have been expected of her. But she had forgotten even those trifles. It was with a sort of terror, therefore, that she realized that she was to be the recipient of favors from these people

of whom she had been, in intention, a secret enemy.

During the late, gay *déjeuner*, the gifts were exchanged. The countess' to Arthur was some exquisitely embroidered handkerchiefs, and to Janet a pretty amethyst bracelet. Arthur gave the countess a gold-and-turquoise vanity box. The count gave Janet an envelope containing five one-hundred-franc notes; she had a book from Arthur; and from Hugh a lovely Egyptian scarabæus of an odd, translucent, greenish-blue.

"Probably the color of your eyes, mademoiselle, made *le bon* Hugh recognize it as fitting for you!" cried the count, with a heavy effort at compliment.

Janet was looking in evident confusion at her gifts.

"I feel that I've been very remiss. I should have thought of getting something for you all," she murmured. "I would have, but we seemed so remote from everything here—so far from every place where gifts were sold—"

"I should have given you some practical information," Arthur cried regretfully, yet gayly, "so you could have done the proper thing. I confess, I expected from you, as an old acquaintance, at *least* a butterfly-bow tie! You could have bought it in Nantes. But you have never been in Nantes since you came—have you?"

The question was like a missile flung at her, as she met his eyes. At once she was filled with the terror that it meant his discovery of her flying, secret visit to the town, as well as of that visit's meaning.

"No, you have never gone to Nantes," the countess echoed, "all this time that you have been here. That is very curious!"

"Have you *really* never been in Nantes?" came from the count.

Hugh alone had not asked that question, which now seemed throbbing in the air.

"No," was her murmured answer, as she fought a secret impulse toward hysteria.

After that, she sat trying to control herself. The gifts were like lashes upon already sensitive flesh. Of course, she would not take them—neither the jewels from Hugh and the countess, nor the money from the count. She would leave them all behind her. When the worst became known about her, they would at least have to concede her this effort at decency—that she had not taken the favors that had been bestowed upon what they had supposed her to be—not upon what she was.

For hope had left her by this time. Neither she nor Arthur was to be told of the plan afoot to get the Lamballieu jewels, nor of the letter that had given the warning. There was not in manner or expression, or in one uttered word, the slightest hint of anything unusual. It was food for thought, of a sort, for her to realize that others than Arthur and his like could play the game of deception well. The countess had even handed Arthur the case containing the string of emeralds, and he was touching them with tenderness. She understood the look of delight, almost of reverence, on his face—this was to be added to the haul!

As she came out of the labyrinth of her thoughts, she realized that the talk was still of Nantes. Various stories of the old town were being revived.

"Dull enough now—a place in which to slumber, on my word!" the count was saying. "But it saw bloody days once!"

"The revolutionary days," said Hugh, "when Carrier turned it into a slaughterhouse!"

Arthur was leaning forward, his eyes alight, the string of jewels still winking in his pale, artistically slender hand.

"Carrier! Ah, he was a splendid beast! How he glutted his astounding, natural ferocity! When you do see the Loire twinkling under the bridges around sleepy old Nantes, Miss Eustis, remember Carrier and his stupendous carnage!"

"I'm afraid I've forgotten Carrier—if I ever knew about him," Janet answered, trying to enter the conversation

naturally and to divert attention from her face, which she could feel cold, drawn, and from the lips whose trembling she could not entirely control.

"He's worth a little consideration," Arthur went on, and she could see that he was at his best—the thought of the approaching danger for the sake of spoil whipping up his spirits to brilliancy. She had seen him in this mood before, during brief, surreptitious visits to her, when he could not help boasting to her of daring, perilous coups that he was about to make. "It's good to be great in some fashion. If you're a monster, then it's good to be the greatest monster possible—and he was. Guillotining people by the hundreds, but one at a time, was too slow for our friend, Jean Baptiste Carrier—oh, much too slow! So he thought of the wholesale drowning scheme—*les noyades*—which meant that boats containing hundreds were scuttled in midstream in the Loire—till thousands and thousands went down! That was what Carrier did in the year seventeen hundred and ninety-three. *Mon Dieu*, what an age to have lived in—bloody, glorious, magnificently horrible! That was life—if you will!"

"But don't forget that Carrier, after all, was made to pay in kind," was Hugh's quiet addition to Arthur's ringing words. "Don't forget that his head rolled at last into the same red basket that had held those of so many of his victims!"

They were not likely to see much of each other during the day, as the planning of the costumes for the dinner was to go forward secretly. Out of the château's treasure-troves a bewildering mélange of characters was possible. Each was to be arrayed as some particular character, and was to give some impersonation in act or in speech that would reveal to the others who the character was. The event promised piquancy.

But Janet felt sure that some last directions from Arthur would be forthcoming, that somehow she would receive them; and she was not mistaken. It was close to five o'clock when she heard the small, insinuating knock upon

her door, and saw immediately after it a morsel of folded paper pushed over the threshold. She caught this up, opened the door, and looked down the hall. Arthur had already disappeared. The message ran:

After dark place your valise on the balcony outside your window. It will be called for there in good time. The rest is simple. You will be with the countess when she drops to sleep. You will open her door to me. After that, you will do just as I say. Tear this up.

She obeyed the latter direction almost frantically, with a heady feeling of success mounting to her brain. He had not learned of her visit to Nantes! The scheme to save was successful. She was resigned now to the fact that the smirch upon her must, afterward, inevitably be discovered. The important thing was to keep the jewels from falling into the hands of Arthur and his accomplices. This would be done. She would appear to play into the plotters' hands and keep them on good terms with her, at the same time using them to effect her own escape. They considered her an unimportant spoke in their wheel—but the spoke meant to turn the wheel to its own advantage!

Still, if suspicion, by reason of some mischance, ever entered their criminal minds against her—what then? Janet had strolled to the window, and was gazing out at the gardens, where a thick, powdery snow had mingled the trees and shrubs with the marble benches and bridges. What, then, indeed? If she were ever labeled "suspect," she would unfailingly, remorselessly be labeled "victim"—the sacrifice that would help satisfy their disappointment and revenge.

The thought clung to her mind as an ugly, adhesive gumminess will stick to the skin. A dark sense of future tragedy went over her in cold ripples; but with it came the fatalism that quietly accepts the irremediable, which is a remote heritage from the Oriental beginnings of us all.

"If it has to be, it will be!"

Just as Arabs, on far-off deserts, might at that very moment be uttering

that phrase with palms held resignedly upward, so Janet said it, gazing from the window of a French château, feeling very young, very lonely and desolate, an alien, with an unguessable future before her, or perhaps no future at all!

What she saw at that moment fitted in startlingly with her dark mood. Without being quite consciously aware of it, the edges of her senses had noted for some seconds something black that fluttered at a distant turn of the garden, against the shining whiteness of the snow-covered bushes. She opened the window, and, guarding herself with the velvet curtain, gazed in suspense at the spot. She saw again the rippling end of a black robe; then a man's black shoulder, and the edge of a big hat. Before she could decide that she was looking at the priest, the place was left blankly white. But she waited, and again, after a moment, she saw the ripple of the robe. The man was plainly keeping out of sight of the house. She received the impression that another person was with him with whom he was conferring—Arthur, no doubt. But somehow she was troubled. The situation seemed unnecessarily reckless and at variance with Arthur's extreme circumspection.

But the next phase of the picture left her still more nonplused. The priest was not with Arthur. His companion was a businesslike, robust man, a practical-looking Frenchman, such as she had seen on the tops of the Paris busses riding to the Bourse, small, black bags beside them. While she gazed, a new sense of unrest and speculation filling her, the priest plunged forward among the trees, and, with his companion, was lost to sight. They did not return.

She was too nervous to remain in her room. Out in the hall, she wavered by her door, listening, watching—as hunters in the jungle await the coming of the lion's padded step and the first sight of his yellow eyes through the leaves. Her prodding impulse was to see Arthur; yet she was afraid to take any step not especially arranged by him. Without any decided intention, she

wandered through the house and in the direction of the picture gallery.

As she approached it, she heard voices, and a moment later Katia came out, carrying over her arm a scarlet velvet cloak. At sight of Janet, she looked guilty, a trembling that told of the tension laid upon her guilty nerves during this critical day passing over her.

"Monsieur Langstreet is in there," she said, smiling with a too excessive amiability. "He is studying a costume that he is copying for the dinner—ah, *magnifique, vraiment!* I am to take some spots from this old red velvet cloak for him. *Mais*—but he will be *un homme de le monde vieux!*" And she hurried down the hall.

Janet stepped quickly into the colorful, skylighted passage with its rows of many-hued canvases. Arthur was seated before a portrait of a gallant in sky-blue and lace, dressed in the court costume of the last of the eighteenth century. He held a small pad of paper restfully against an upraised knee, and was sketching an outline of some details of the portrait's dress. He rose like a flash on seeing her. In an instant, he was the thief, scenting trouble. The lazy peace vanished from his face; his eyes narrowed; his lips went sharply down like a toad's. It was as ugly a look as one could possibly imagine.

"Well?" was all he said, as he reached her, but the word conveyed a complexity of questions. "You've found out something? Does it mean that we're cornered? And, if so—is there time to clear out? Is there time?"

"Why does that priest—Ricet—haunt the garden?" she asked breathlessly. "Although it's getting shadowy, he could be plainly seen if any one looked from my side of the house."

He was plainly amazed.

"Ricet? You must be crazy! After we pull off the business here, he's to get away in a new disguise with his share, take the late train from Nantes, and hide for a few days in Angers. That was all arranged—so he can't be here. You didn't see him."

"But I tell you I did—plainly! What

other priest would be in the garden, stealthily talking to a stranger?"

"A stranger?" Again he was dazed. "What was the stranger like?"

She told him, and he stood with bright, rigid eyes, thinking.

"I don't understand it! The fellow must be mad!"

"Was he to come for the valises—to take them from the balcony?"

"Not he," Arthur answered, in a small, shut-in voice; "one of the others who are to get away with us in the motor from Chantenay."

"It seems to me that having the valises called for is an unnecessary risk—" she began.

"Not at all! We'll want to appear as ordinary travelers at the first place we put up, and some luggage is necessary. The others will have all that they can do to attend to their own. We couldn't carry the valises from here at the last moment. My God—I should say not!" he whispered, in a sort of anticipative growl. "Who knows? Things may not turn out quite as we plan them, and we may have to make a fight for a get-away."

"Fight?"

The word was a dying one; she gazed at him with lips like ashes.

"Certainly—fight! Suppose that cautious Maxwell gets suspicious. He may be ungracious enough not to drink the coffee—may insist on remaining singularly wide awake. In that case, anything may happen! My dear, get your nerve, and hold it. We may have to leave dead bodies behind us. So—face it!"

She swayed from him in horror, and he caught her. As she did so, a gurgle of sneering laughter left him.

"That would be a pity—wouldn't it? Not a pleasant way of saying adieu to the brave Maxwell, who is quite dotty about you! Oh, my precious, your Arthur is not a blind bat! Sorry to spoil your romance this way. But you know it was not counted in when we went into partnership that morning in Paris."

Though faint with a ghastly sickness, she regained some composure. There

was only one hope for them—if he would surrender *now*—not try to finish! She gazed at him as if he were a judge and she was pleading for her life.

"Do you believe," she asked, in a low voice that was a vehement, suppressed prayer, "that women are sometimes made to know truths by an intuition that defies all explanation?"

"Don't argue!" he snapped. "I'm going to have a look around the garden before I dress. What you've said has upset me. You go to your room. It's just as well that you get back—*now*."

"But, Arthur, as I've never prayed for anything in my life before, I pray that you give up this terrible thing! Look at what proportions it has assumed," she urged hysterically. "Just think! When I was desperate, and you found me, I consented to help you get one jewel—the ruby brooch! But your greediness would not stop there. Little by little it has grown, until now you talk calmly of possible murder!"

Other words that she tried to say failed her. As he pushed her angrily toward the door, she gave a low, vanquished cry:

"Oh, is there nothing to be done?"

"I've told you what to do. Get to your room! Take something to drink before you come in to the dinner. The butler will give you some brandy. Afterward, don't touch the coffee. Later, when the countess goes to sleep, open her door for me. Still later, be ready to leave by means of the balcony in your room. Now you know exactly. It's all as easy as turning your hand. Nothing at all may happen to upset our scheme—so get your nerve! The only thing that would make a mess of the business would be their failing to drink the coffee. Once they do that—they'll sleep, believe me! Now, get back—and right away! If you meet any one, don't speak to them, for you look like something that's been dead just coming back to life."

His fingers bruised her arm viciously as he pushed her through the doorway. She gave one quick glance back, and saw that he had seated himself again before the picture, as if sketching, but

his hand was shut and rigid. She hurried back to her room, groped to the bed, and fell upon it, shivering.

Chaos had come upon her world everywhere—even upon her world of thought. Now she began to wonder if the Nantes letter, giving the warning, might not be the very thing that would precipitate a tragedy. How well these people had kept their own counsel since its receipt! Who, to watch their gayety the night before and all this Christmas Day, would have supposed that they were aware of a danger threatening them? If they could so feign what they did *not* feel, who could say what hidden plans they had made for their own protection? Suppose, keyed to suspicion of everybody, something—some little thing—might prevent their drinking the doctored coffee, or at least their drinking enough of it to affect the purpose for which it had been planned? If that happened, the smooth exit arranged by Arthur could not possibly be affected.

The thought made her spring to her knees, her eyes, all panic, searching the silent room, as if for some inspiration to help her. All that she longed for—and this she did long for with every beat of her blood and every passage of her breath—was that she and Arthur might be able to steal from the château while the others slept, he empty-handed! Only to go *unseen*! Not to have to look into their eyes—into Hugh's eyes—after they *knew*! This was her prayer.

And at the same moment, there was something both pitiful and terrifying in the realization that what she was praying for depended on one banal, seemingly inconspicuous detail—the drinking of the doctored coffee by those whom Arthur considered his dupes. The thought of this obsessed her from that moment. As she made ready for the dinner, when she descended at length to get through the ordeal as best she might, when she followed Arthur's advice and drank a little brandy and water to bring some fire to her failing heart and some color to her livid lips—she was thinking of the moment when the coffee service would be brought to the table. That moment would mean hope or despair!

CHAPTER XVI.

They were all in the salon, when Janet entered it. It was like stepping from the present back into some illuminated block of French history. Even with every nerve so edged that it was biting pain, her sense of beauty was overfilled by what she saw in the fire-light and the candlelight. Three splendid beings shimmered there. All that rich colors, powder, patches, glittering swords, and flashing jewels could do in the creation of charming fantasy had been done.

She herself was dressed very simply in pale gray silk; the long, billowing sleeves were fastened closely at her wrists; a pale-green scarf fluttered from her shoulders; on her bosom rested one glorious, creamy rose. She had chosen to represent the girl in Millais' well-known picture, "The Huguenot Lovers," she who ties around her lover's arm the badge that is to shield him from harm. Her flaming hair was parted and braided as simply as that of Millais' model; her eyes had all the excitement of the girl's, but with something black and frightened back of their blueness—something that gaped a pathetic inquiry at life.

Hugh was thrilled by a pity for her that was an actual physical anguish. She seemed so slight, so helpless, so vacillating—a mere willow wand of a woman—and her big, shadowy eyes were those of a worn nun's.

The countess was the personification of Versailles *en fête*—Versailles at the height of its egregious, insolent splendor. The enormous height of her powdered coiffure alone would have betrayed her character. Instead of the Pompadour, she had come down, ablaze with gems, as Marie Antoinette.

The count was Henri Quatre, and lamented lugubriously that he had ne Diane de Poitiers.

Hugh was De Grammont, a white-silks-in-and-purple exquisite, who might well have just come from England, from the salacious frivolities of the court of the merry Merry Monarch—"to give them all dead away in a set of gossiping me-

moirs later!" as Arthur called out challengingly.

And Arthur? The others paled beside him, as he had meant they should. He was a born leader. Even now—a secret wolf among sheep—his superb impudence and towering vanity could not resist the temptation to outshine them all. To this was added all the extravagance of the gambler who seeks to make his last throw his most spectacular one. Janet understood him so well! After he had decamped with their property, and had been written down by them as a thief, he wished to be remembered vividly by each one of them—and remembered at his best.

He was splendidly garbed in a costume of the revolutionary period—a mixture of sky blue with touches of rich, dark fur and lace. His powdered periuke set off the creaminess and pale rose of his skin; a black mustache made his red mouth and flashing, pointed teeth look more scornfully gay, as did the angle at which he had placed the long, black velvet hat with its drooping, crosswise points, the one just over one eye ending in a small, foppish bow that was a telling and insouciant touch. From his shoulders fell the folded scarlet cloak that Katia had carried. His fantastically buckled slippers had scarlet heels.

But the two notes of his ensemble that interested most piquantly, and that brought the confusion for which he had planned, were the revolutionary's red cap, which he twirled upon a naked sword, and the ruff that hid his neck to his ears—that neck being carried in a one-sided way, uncannily suggestive of some deformity.

They gave up trying to name him, and went into dinner. Often, during the play of words that flew back and forth like bubbles that touched and broke, they tried to solve the riddle of his make-up, but no one succeeded.

The frostbite of the champagne helped Janet to conquer the quivering of her muscles, and at times she was able to throw out a pale-lipped witticism or question.

"You are Scarpia, surely," she said,

toward the close of the dinner. "You have Mario's cap in your hand; and outside somewhere, *La Tosca* is knocking, knocking, asking you to have mercy. Am I right?"

"No, Miss Eustis." Arthur laughed, and twirled his long, gay mustache at her. "But, as the small boys say, 'you are warm.' I certainly have more than a speaking acquaintance with Scarpia." He sprang up boyishly. "I'll tell you—let's have only the candles on the table as we have coffee. Then I'll go out, and come back into the dimness, and if you listen well, you shall hear who I am! Let me tell you my own way. You will—won't you?"

The countess expressed her consent in little shrieks of delight.

"I knew *le bon* Langstreet would think up something delicious! My word—but this is better than being in stupid Algiers! How glad I am that we waited!"

And she wagged her gem-studded, monstrous coiffure at the count.

As Arthur spoke the word, "coffee," he looked straight at Janet, and she felt as if the very gate of her life had been struck open and left gaping. Still, as they put out the upper lights, he continued to look, but in a way that no other than herself could have understood—just the flit of a sardonic smile that lifted slightly the left corner of his narrowed lips; just the flicker of a glance.

In this way, a rapid fire of meanings was exchanged between them. Once outside, he would find the chance to put the drug in the coffee; she was to watch that all drank of it. The strained gaze snapped, and she pulled her soul into hiding behind her drooped lids. She could not have looked at Hugh then, if her life had depended on it.

But after Arthur had left the room, Hugh, though still laughing with the others and evidently sharing their expectancy in the coming surprise, kept his eyes on her. Under her rigid face, he saw the storm of wretchedness, the tumult of wild doubt. His compassion went out to her in a flood. In fancy, he was seizing her cold hands, kissing

her cold face, drawing her toward him, whispering:

"Little, stray lamb! Little, stray lamb that I wanted to help over the rough places—you are sorrowing in silence!"

During this pause, the three with whom she sat seemed to Janet to have retreated to an appalling distance. She felt herself in an ice-cold loneliness, suspended over some measureless gulf. If she cried out, perhaps they would help her. Perhaps casting all planning and counter-planning to the winds and throwing herself and Arthur upon their mercy would be better than trying to use the subterfuge she had arranged as a secret weapon. As she sat there, clasped as if by iron bands to the chair, cold and hot in the surges of indecision, the door opened and the butler entered with the coffee equipage upon the wheeled tray. Arthur followed just behind him, his own cup poised delicately in his upraised hand.

She felt him seek her eyes. She had no choice but to look at him—and, once she had looked, all idea of confession died.

"Take care—play your part—wake up from your frozen terror," his eyes said to her as plainly as words. "The price of any backsliding will be your *life*!"

She knew that if she obeyed the insurgent desire of this moment, he would think no more of killing her and himself than of drinking the undrugged cup of coffee that he had reserved for his own sipping.

Besides, as he began to portray the character that he had assumed, she found herself, like the rest, coming under his strangely irresistible spell, which had always had a touch of the infernal in it. Only the soft light of the six tall candles on the table, and the rosy glow of the fire, filled the great room. Around the board lolled the other three, in restful attitudes, the result of the Christmas cheer, the intimacy of the hour, the subdued light, and their suspended interest in what Arthur had prepared for them.

He stood where the fire threw a copperish radiance on his face, while from

time to time, as he talked, a pointed shadow leaped over it with a most fittingly demoniac suggestion. After resting the small cup and saucer on the high mantel, he laid beside it the red cap of rebellion and the naked sword. His head was still held gruesomely sideways.

He raised one delicate hand, from which the ruffles fell back in a creamy cascade, and his first words sent a chill over them:

"I am Carrier!"

"Carrier?" came shiveringly from the countess. "Mon Dieu—it is true!"

"Carrier?" the others whispered, and their gaze traveled over every detail of Arthur's convincing make-up.

"I am he," he murmured, in a cruel yet dreamy voice, while light and shadow lunged like tongues at him, "who was more feared than any plague. I fear that I've overdressed the part; Carrier was not a fop. But listen, as you sit over your coffee, and you will hear what Carlyle, in 'The French Revolution,' says of him."

The countess took a small sip of the coffee; the others did likewise. As Janet watched them, she felt the blood rise to her brain, and pound there as if churned.

Arthur began to speak in a far-away monotone, indescribably thrilling—a voice that belonged to a ghost, but a bloody one—a voice out of a past made up of violence and sin:

"Hearest thou not (for the sound reaches through centuries) in the dead December and January nights, over Nantes town, confused noises as of musketry and tumult, as of rage and lamentation, and mingling with the everlasting moan of the Loire waters there? Nantes town is sunk in sleep, but Réprésentant Carrier is not sleeping. Why unmoors that flat-bottomed craft, that *gabare*, about eleven at night, with ninety priests under hatches? They are going to Belle Isle. In the middle of the Loire stream, on signal given the *gabare* is scuttled, and she sinks with all her cargo. It is the first of the *noyades*, what we may call the *drownages* of Carrier.

"Guillotining there was at Nantes till the Headsman sank, worn out; then fusillading in the Plain of Saint Mauve; little children were fusilladed; and women with children at the breast; children and women

by the hundred and twenty; and by the five hundred—so hot is *la Vendée*; till the very Jacobins grew sick . . . wherefore now we have *noyading* on this December night seventeen ninety-three—a *noyade* consisting of a hundred and thirty-eight persons.

"Or why waste a *gabare* sinking it with them? Fling them out! Fling them out with their hands tied; pour a continual hail of lead over all the space till the last strugger of them be sunk! Unsound sleepers of Nantes, and the sea villages thereabout, hear the musketry amid the night winds; wonder what the meaning of it is.

"And women were in that *gabare* whom the red night caps were stripping naked, who begged in their agony that their smocks might not be stripped from them. And women and men are tied together, feet and feet, hands and hands, and flung in—this they call the Republican marriage.

"These are the drowning *en masse*, the *noyades* of Carrier! Twenty-five *gabares* by the tale—six to nine thousand in all. And what is done in darkness comes shamed to sunlight, not to be forgotten for centuries!"

His voice stopped, and the silence of the room was weighted with the memory of a horror that could never die. As if the wraiths of the drowned had been waked to a momentary, spurious life by the hushed but passionate words, there rose outside in the December darkness the wailing sound of the far-off sea and the lonely cry of some belated gulls.

All the time Arthur had been speaking, his restless, flickering eyes had watched the little cups as they were lifted again and again to the lips of the four listeners, three of whom really drank the black and powerful fluid with which they were filled. He lifted the red cap and stepped to the table.

"What think you, friends, of Carrier?" he asked, with his illuminating smile.

"I am chilled to the marrow," said the countess; "but it was heavenly! Not in years has my flesh crinkled so deliciously."

"It will crinkle a bit more," said Arthur, in a suave, menacing tone. "Have you no question about the fate of Carrier?"

Hugh had been leaning forward on his elbows, his fascinated eyes on the face of the speaker. As he answered, there was a triumphant flavor to the

words, as if he spoke them to the real murderer flaming so picturesquely before him.

"Carrier was guillotined—dragged to slaughter. That is so often the fate of the glutted hyena—is it not?"

"And now," said Arthur, turning gracefully from him to the countess, whose black eyes were alight, although she shrank from him, "you know why it is so hard for me to hold my head erect, madame la comtesse! Alas—in putting back my head, I made a bad job of it—a little to the side—the ear not quite in place!"

He drew down the high ruff, and they saw a circlet of flaming crimson around his throat.

The countess screamed for lights, but playfully. The others rose, startled. Arthur burst into the gayest, most boyish laughter.

"Ah, mesdames and messieurs, no need to leave The Gulls for the little theater of horrors in Paris—La Grande Guignol! I give them to you—and free of charge. Quite free! Not a sou for all this adorable gooseflesh, madame la comtesse!"

The butler put the wick to the candles in the high chandelier, and reality came back to the scene. The dinner was virtually over. The coffee cups were all drained. Already the countess was beginning to yawn.

"I am feeling so sleepy!" she murmured. "I have not had so much champagne in a month of Sundays—that's what's done it. Give me some more coffee, or I shall go to sleep before I can get out of all this toggery."

Janet did not dare look at Arthur, but she guessed the businesslike satisfaction of his soul as he watched Hugh replenish the countess' cup. In crossing to look out at the night, he passed Janet, and let his fingers touch her shoulders in a warning pressure. He remained so long at the window, the curtain lifted, that she felt sure it was a prearranged signal to one of his watchers.

"It is snowing hard," he murmured, as he turned back, "and I never heard the gulls as noisy as they are to-night."

"Even the gulls," said Hugh, as he rose—and his words were spoken through a strangled yawn—"seem to have a proper sense of scenic effect. They are giving footnotes to the Carrier horrors you so cleverly revived."

In the shortest while—so quickly, indeed, that there was something of a dream's dissolving in it—the drowsy masqueraders had separated. The count had assisted the countess to her room, both yawning, and drooping against each other. Hugh had settled himself before the fire for a last cigar and a talk with Arthur. In ten minutes the cigar had fallen from his hand, his head was back, and he had fallen into a deathlike sleep.

There Arthur left him and went to his room, where his hands flew in stripping the satin and velvet of Carrier from his body and substituting the comfortable clothes that he would need for the motor dash through the storm and for the fatigue of the journey after it, during which there was to be no pause until Holland was reached.

Janet had also reached her room. She, too, was quickly almost ready for what lay before her. She put on stout shoes and stockings, bound up coronet-wise around her head the long braids of the Huguenot girl, flung a coat, a warm gown, and a small, veiled hat where she could readily get them, then put on her satin dressing gown, as she waited for the countess' summons, which, after her failure to get Katia, would surely come.

Her excited eyes watched the clock with widened pupils. How many moments after she had taken off her jewels and given them to the count to put in the new, safe hiding place, would the countess wait for Katia to answer the bell? Possibly three or four, for patience was not a characteristic of the château's mistress. So, chilled and quivering, Janet, in fancy watching Katia as she waited in unhappy suspense at the Nantes station for the lover who would not come, stood with her eyes upon the creeping seconds.

Only five moments had passed when the countess' bell rang sharply. There was a wait, and it rang again.

CHAPTER XVII.

As Janet hurried down the hall, the count was coming from his wife's room. He carried something that bulged under the left side of his black satin Henri Quatre coat.

"The jewels!" was the thought that made a ringing in Janet's brain. "He is carrying them to the new place!"

That she had done this much as reparation gave her a comparative happiness. She could go through the farce of the robbery successfully now. Her sense of honor was, to an extent, relieved; a burden lifted from her spirit.

She entered, to find the countess as furious as her drugged condition permitted.

"Where is she—that stupid thing of wood! I have rung—and rung—" she yawned. "Katia is a cross to me! Oh, she will go packing—Algiers will not see that dull-witted animal! Oh, Miss Eustis, get me to bed, in Heaven's name! What is this? I am toppling with sleep—one would think we had all drunk something"—the words came brokenly, and more and more thickly—"something—some drug—drug—"

Janet undressed her rapidly. She was bare of a single jewel—not even a ring. In less than a quarter of an hour, she was under the satin sheets, breathing deeply.

So far, the plot had progressed without a hitch! Janet felt that Hugh and the count must be asleep by this time. Arthur must be ready and waiting. An almost unbearable stillness was in the room. When she opened the door, the same stillness brooded over the whole house. She and Arthur were like goblin besiegers of a castle, all the inmates, through necromancy, sunk in an all-conquering sleep. The wind whinnied. From the distance came the lament of the sea.

As she waited tremulously upon the threshold, out of the shadows a moving shadow slipped to her, and Arthur, pale as death, with lips set and eyes glistening, was in the room. In the heavy overcoat, and with a soft hat crushed low on his head, how different he was

from the smiling, evilly fascinating masquerader who had held a sort of mental saturnalia in the fire glow and candle-light below, not an hour earlier!

He closed the door, and came to her side with the soundlessness that belongs to skulking animal life in the safe darkness of the thicket—the velvet stealth that is the natural equipment of the born rogue! He held out to her a dark lump of cloth, from which a chilling, aromatic odor ascended.

"The bed!" he directed masterfully. "Bend over her. If she moves, wave this close to her face. Don't let it touch her!"

In a magnetized numbness, she obeyed—but her gaze, instead of resting on the countess' prone head, kept shifting to Arthur, who had reached the portrait that covered the panel door of the safe.

She saw him lift this to the floor. She heard sharp, little clicks of iron and steel; saw the expert flash of his hands, the rise and fall of his arms as he worked deftly. She was waiting to hear the first wrench of the wood. When it came, a hard quiver went through her. In the silence, it was grotesquely loud. But the countess' breathing did not alter. As Arthur paused from time to time between his attacking twists into the wood, the clock could be heard ticking peacefully. The place was theirs!

After a moment packed with a suspense that was an agony, Janet heard a long sigh of delight from Arthur. She knew that he had the door open. There was a pause that made her think of the stillness that might hang over a city when a shell rests quiveringly in the high air above it, just before its fall. She waited for the first sound of fury and disappointment from Arthur.

None came. As she stood faltering by the bed, he hurried forward from the shadows, his white face aglow with a greed and a triumph that were as forceful as a blow. In his hands was the countess' large jewel case. Bulging from each pocket of his coat were smaller boxes.

"Empty? Are they empty?" Janet whispered, the words almost choking

her, as she faltered nearer. "Have you looked? *They are empty!*"

"Watch there, you fool!" he muttered, pointing to the bed.

As she reeled back, her rapacious eyes never leaving the case in his hand, he began to unlock it and unclasp its hasps.

"Why the devil should you suppose it empty?"

He pulled up the cover, and from the divided spaces came in a rush the prismatic flash of many-colored gems. As if turned to a block of stone, Janet's rigid eyes saw him swiftly lift the upper compartment and display the under one. Three bracelets and several rings were there. In the lowest one were two necklaces. After this, made keenly cautious by her surprising question, he took from his pockets the other oblong cases, and opened them. One held the new string of emeralds; the other, pendants and hair ornaments of diamonds.

He had them all—all the Lamballieu jewels—all those twinkling strings, each a fortune in itself, that she had tried to put beyond his reach! She had failed! He had them all! Triumphant, stuffed with loot, reminding her of a vulture rising, gorged, from a plain covered with the dead, he stood there and smiled at her.

"Empty?" he echoed rapidly. "You see how empty they are! What made you think so?"

Her words had puzzled him. He was used to considering every smallest thing that in the remotest way touched himself or his intrigues. So, even in that intense moment, on the edge of flight, he found her words returning to him again and again.

"Empty!" he muttered wonderingly, as he blew out the candles, and she felt his fingers close like a trap upon her arm as he pulled her toward the door.

On the way to her room, her mind was in a confusion that was disorganized. She could decide nothing. The thought that he had the jewels would fly terrified before the other thought that clashed upon it: Why had her warning to the count been disregarded? The shock left her shaken, dismayed.

She seemed to be holding on to the edge of the world with the tips of her fingers. In this futile manner, in this flagging and questioning condition, she followed him.

"Quick now!" he muttered, and pointed to her clothes upon the chair.

As she hastily fastened her gown and lifted the heavy coat, she felt that she was performing actions for which she was not responsible, things that she not only did not mean to do, but that she detested doing!

The significance of Arthur's waiting stolidly for her by the window began to sharpen—she saw in it her own overwhelming defeat. He was there with well-lined pockets, and she was to go with him, her flight as an accomplice to seem a planned and willing one! The thought made a hurt that she could not endure.

She pinned on her hat, while deep within her the determination to stand clear of this pitch intensified. She would not leave the château with a thief and as a thief! Open defiance, however, would mean her death in a twinkling—if it were Arthur's safety against her life, he would not hesitate. And she did not want to die! A self within her was holding out piteous hands to life—to a future where she was to have another chance—a clean and brave and hopeful chance. No, she did not want to die. But what could she do?

"It will come to me! I will think of something!" she was crying inwardly, like a distracted child looking for a hand to guide it from danger.

"Don't potter so! You're devilish long!" Arthur muttered. His irises, widened and black, flared at her, his mouth twitched.

There was only one thing that could be done. Sharply, illuminatingly, she saw that she must manage to get to the count—to Hugh—and try to rouse them. Even if the attempt were a failure, so far as preventing Arthur's getting off with his spoil went, they would know that she had been against the robbery—that she had done what she could to turn wrong into right.

"My—cardcase—with papers in it

that I wouldn't want found—I can't leave it behind me!" she faltered, making a hasty, apologetic gesture toward him, and moving fumblingly toward the door.

"Where are you going?"

The whisper was so piercing, so incisive, that it halted her. She gave a wavering glance back at him.

"The countess' room—my cardcase," she said thickly.

He reached her in a few rapid steps, seized her by the shoulders, and stared into her eyes.

"There's something about you that I don't like. No—I don't like it at all! What are you up to? By God—if you're getting under me any way——"

He stopped. The malediction flaming from his pallid face was enough.

Still she struggled, but now it was with a failing sense, with defeat before her sick eyes.

"Wait here—just till I find my cardcase!"

"You get to that window!" he ordered, in a small and terrible voice, as he half dragged her to it. "If you find life at all to your liking, don't you make a move, from this moment on, that is not arranged for by me or through me."

A tempest, of rage and fear mixed, was thrilling through him. She felt it in the jolting hand that held her with such brutal determination. In this way she was propelled to the window, out through the half-opened doors, and on to the floor of the balcony.

But there she grew wild. There she flung to the winds the desire to live. Indeed, she did not want to live if she must pay for it at a price that was soul-sickening. With a cry of overwhelming disgust, she twisted from him, bending back over the balcony's rail as she pulled at his hands.

"I won't go! You shall not take me with you!" she cried, in hysteria.

Her voice rang over the silent garden. She was dimly aware that something flashed sharply in Arthur's hand. But it meant nothing to her now. Effort was concentrated upon one thing—to stand clear of him, and with clean hands—to stand clear of the crew waiting in

the farther darkness, along the roads, hidden by the veiling snow.

"Keep quiet!" he whispered, so close to her face that she felt his breath in spurts.

"No--no--no!" Her voice rang out, though half strangled by his groping hand. "Go alone! I won't go!"

"I don't want to kill you—I don't want to—but—"

He flung one arm around her, and tried to drag her down the steps.

Her resistance was wild. She shrieked again and again—shrieks that some frightened gulls answered.

"I won't go! I warned them! I won't go!"

At her words, his clasp loosened. Through the darkness, she saw his face become gray. It was like the smoky negative of a photograph, only the eyes blazing out as if lights had been placed behind them.

"Warned—they knew! Then—" His voice broke. He threw her from him, and wheeled. She saw that her words had terrified him. He scented danger. He must try to run like a hunted fox, for his own safety. He would not wait to try to silence her, or to punish her. She was utterly valueless now, whereas the perilous seconds had become unutterably precious.

As she struggled from the corner of the balcony, she saw him plunge down the stairway. Still with some idea of preventing his escape with the jewels—with an inchoate belief that by keeping him in sight she might in some way retard him, she followed him stumblingly, gasping for breath.

It was then that the amazing thing happened—when halfway down the steps, he paused so suddenly that she fell against him. A suppressed sound of malediction and despair whimpered from him. For a second or two, he remained rigid; then he turned, doubled on his steps, and clutched the rail.

As she saw what had stayed him, she, too, clutched the rail and crouched there, waiting. Gazing over his head, which, as he lay, almost touched her feet, she saw two round, glittering points winking through the snow, and beyond them

two lumpish mounds of darkness that moved slowly nearer. It was upon these glittering points that Arthur had stumbled—these were what had driven him back.

"Lie there!" Janet heard a voice cry out in French, a voice that seemed strange and yet that had something strikingly familiar in it. "Don't budge an inch, Newell—alias Langstreet—or you'll get two bullets into you!"

As the shadows crashed down upon Arthur, Janet came to life. She crawled heavily to her window. Wet, half blinded, she stumbled into her room, where the candle was still alight. She waited there, her arm flung about the bedpost to steady herself.

Outside the windows, the medley of voices came nearer—Arthur's snarling; that other that she knew, yet did not know; and then—yes—*Hugh's!* Still other voices sounded from the grounds, and were answered by the men on the balcony steps; from greater distance the blast of a motor siren boomed out; this was followed by a long, piercing, commanding whistle. The ominous world was rent with alarms!

A threatening numbness was creeping over Janet's body—only her mind worked. Things had happened, and were happening, wholly out of her reckoning. How could Hugh, after drinking the coffee, be there, one of Arthur's captors? Had its purpose failed with the others, also? These questions trailed away into mist.

The air was full of pregnant meaning, for the sense of which she groped futilely. Before the prod of her questioning, doors opened before her just a little way, sending out gleams that promised full knowledge of what lay beyond. Then the doors would seem to shut again upon her, leaving her outside, still bewildered, still questioning.

Figures in a blur were coming through the window now. Janet sank to a chair, sat forward with clutched hands, and watched, as if her life depended on it, this picture that made her taste the very kernel of shame.

Two men—and one of them she knew was Hugh—wearing heavy, frieze coats

and slouched hats, were half carrying Arthur through the wind-blown curtains. He lunged and protested so fiercely that he impelled them in a mass past the bed to the farthest corner by the door. There they threw him. While the stranger held him down, Janet saw Hugh search him—saw him lift the jewel cases from his pockets one after another.

"All here," she heard him say.
"Seems all right!"

Arthur was lifted to a chair. Something snapped. She saw the flash of metal on his wrists. She heard his wild groan. And then, as she bent forward, watching, wiping the icy sweat from her numbed face, he looked across at her. No need of speech from him—that slow, level look, straight *into* her, was a cry of black anathema:

"*You* have done this!"

This truth filled him—but his amaze at it was plain—that *she* had been able to play a secret game against him and succeed!

Through the window, left wide open, a gale swept suddenly, making the candle flame shake like a palsied creature resenting disturbance. Its flickering played unmasking tricks with Arthur's face—that livid and glistening mask, with narrowed eyes, raging and black.

It shot through Janet's mind that he, by every natural law, belonged outside and to the storm that tore on now with witchlike screeches, rousing the sea to a more sonorous moaning. In that electric moment—an awesome revelation—she was for the first time facing the *real* Arthur of which she had never before had more than hints. His smooth manner, his winsomeness, his courtesy, his glibness and fascinating persuasiveness, had fallen from him as the peel does from stripped fruit. This flaming spirit, maleficent, unconquerable—this jungle prowler, exuding venom and corruption—this was the real man! A volume of horrid knowledge, offered by one and read by the other, was in that long look. When Arthur turned his eyes from her, a sick shuddering went over Janet. She sank back, fighting collapse as she would an enemy.

After that she lost all count of time. The moments during which she sat there, an outsider, waiting for her fate, whatever it was to be, seemed like hours, like days. Everything was in a mist, but out of it there crept to her from time to time things that seemed bits of delirium, so fantastically confusing were they.

A man came through the window, talking excitedly and pointing back—he was the provincial-looking business man that she had seen that day at dusk talking to the priest in the garden. Talking to the priest, who was one of Arthur's band, yet now evidently one of his captors! What did this mean?

Vaguely she wondered, and then this wonder faded to make room for another. When the other man, Hugh's companion, lifted his hat to wipe his forehead, she saw he was the count.

She could not believe it—closed her eyes, and then weakly opened them. Yes, he was the count! But he was no more like the man she had known than a hackney cob is like a straining racer. He had complete control of the situation. He directed. He was obeyed. No wonder that Arthur, now wholly subdued, kept watching him in bewilderment! No wonder that she had been puzzled by his voice, heretofore the lazy, drawling voice of a sluggish gourmand—to-night as vigorous and strident as his heavy body was quick moving and decisive.

And now, out of the mist, she saw Hugh turn, look at her, and then come toward her. Ah, the anguish! She wanted to slip through the solid ground—to fly somewhere. But she could not move. He was beside her, but she did not look at him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"More than you expected has happened," he was saying kindly; "things that stun you, but that soon you'll understand, Miss Eustis."

"Don't call me that!"

She put both shaking hands to her face, and spread them to their widest as a screen for her shame.

Hugh shuddered. Once, in China, he had seen a coolie wretch make just that shielding gesture as he stood dumbly beside the headsman and before the crowd who stolidly, implacably, waited to see him die.

"Oh, don't—don't call me that!" she said again, in a thin, sick whisper. "It is not my name. I am his wife—I am his wife!"

"I feared so," he said quietly.

Having spoken, she drew back from him, and turned her face so that it was pressed to the tall back of the ancient chair.

"Tell me something," she stammered. "You got the letter that warned you not to leave—the—the jewels in their usual hiding place. Then why—why—were they still there? He'd have gone—and I with him—he defeated—I rejoicing—and you would never have seen or heard of either of us again? Why wasn't it done?"

"It's a long story. You're weak. There's a good deal before you," he answered.

She still pursued her thoughts.

"You drank—that coffee. It was drugged. We could have stolen away so easily, but taking nothing with us! If only—only—" she moaned.

"The coffee was not drugged," said Hugh. "Everything that has happened was carefully arranged for, long, long before your letter came—"

Her hands flickered down, and she looked up at him, though to do so was like tasting death.

"My letter? Did I say that I sent it?"

"No, I knew it, nevertheless."

She let the struggle to comprehend die down.

"Are—are—they taking—him—to prison?"

"What else?" Hugh's pitying voice was firm. "Of course."

"And—and me—with him?"

He touched her shoulder. He made her look up.

"How can you ask me that? I knew everything about you. I told you once that I'd help you if you needed me. I am helping you—and will to the end."

Her cold cheek fell to his hand. He felt her tears upon it as it rested there. "Stay here. Just keep quiet," he whispered. "I'll come back to you."

Hugh had moved away from her on hearing a voice from the hall. The others also looked toward the door, at the same time forcing Arthur to his feet.

"The motor he had waiting at Chantenay will soon be here, and ready for him! The others are in jail. One got away toward Nantes!"

These words came through the door from the hall, and in a woman's voice. Other voices were heard there, but more faintly, and for a moment they mingled with hers. After this pause, the speaker came in. She enjoyed her entrance, too—for she came in laughing in a brusque, hearty way, and faced Arthur.

Janet had struggled up, and was gazing stupidly at her. The countess? But to believe this was to feel unreality crash on one, and stupefaction take the place of incredulity. She wore a satin dressing gown, but it was awkwardly pinned up, leaving a good portion of leg and a heavy walking boot exposed. Over this gown she wore a raincoat; and a gray woolen muffler fell back from her head. The copper-colored puffs and curls that had always been reared high upon her head were replaced by sparse, gray hair, drawn tightly back into a small knob. She moved with the vigor of a gendarme. In the hand that she kept waving authoritatively, a long, brown cigarette was burning.

"It's about time for you to go!" she cried to Arthur. "Isn't it, my dear Langstreet—my handsome Carrier? Ha—ha!" The laugh was one that might properly have issued from between the swinging doors of a *brasserie* as she planted herself before him, her legs wide apart, in a triumphant swagger. "Sure you have all the stuff off him?" she asked, looking sideways at the others. "Sure he hasn't cracked any to his pals, or swallowed it?" She blew a cloud of smoke through her nostrils as she turned, evidently looking about for Janet.

Seeing her as she leaned against the bedpost, staring in wild disbelief, the countess smiled sneeringly.

"Ah, Miss Eustis—I am inconsiderate! After you left me tucked in so nicely, too, between my satin sheets and with my nice little boudoir cap on, all trimmed with rosebuds! I'll tell you what—"

She stopped suddenly. Hugh had come to her. His hand gripped her shoulder angrily.

"No more of this sort of thing. Do you understand? That's quite outside the arrangement. Finish your work quietly, if you please!"

He spoke with such care that Arthur did not hear the astonishing words and the even more astonishing tone. Hugh had never before addressed his aunt in this way. Was his curtness a result of the surprising, coarse clownishness that the woman seemed to take an unbridled joy in displaying?

She gave him a respectful nod, and began to explain.

"Ah, monsieur—I must have my bit of jubilation! That's all. But I will do as you have directed about—*her*," she added, nodding toward Janet.

She had answered him as an employee would a master! She had called him "monsieur"!

Hugh met Janet's wide, seeking eyes. He stepped to her side.

"As soon as—as—well, let us still call him Langstreet—is taken down," he said quietly, "I want you to step out on the balcony and wait there until I come to you. Don't try to understand anything. Just do as I say."

He left her then, and stood by the door.

"Fetch him along, now!" Hugh cried. "I hear the motor."

Janet seemed to go down into a pit as the vital moment came. She realized now that she had never expected to see Arthur forced to this extremity. That other men, not half as cold-bloodedly vicious, should be made to face a reckoning, seemed natural enough. But not Arthur—not this brilliant, merciful swindler, who seemed master of the most infernal resource. Yet here he

was, in the grip of men who were to land him before that impersonal terror—the law of the land. And he was going without a last word!

Curious that he should submit so tamely, his lids hiding his eyes, his lips mute! There was something unnatural about this cowed man. He did not seem Arthur at all.

That she understood him well became evident the next moment. With the two men pressing close against him, he quietly resisted their efforts to direct him toward the door.

"Gentlemen," he said very amiably, while visibly hardening his muscles against them, "you can't say that I've been disagreeable. I've submitted like a lamb. Will you permit me a last word with the charming girl you have known as Miss Eustis?" He smiled toward Janet. "My wife, gentlemen! The lady is *my wife*! She need not come an inch nearer to me, nor I to her. Permit me merely to say—good-by."

The count and the strange man remained stock-still, but did not refuse. The countess sprawled in an armchair, and watchfully eyed every one with the air of one taking note of every smallest detail. They were undoubtedly waiting for Hugh's decision. He stepped back swiftly into the room.

"Be careful what you say to your wife. Keep a civil tongue. Be careful!" he reiterated, his look an imperious and a piercing one.

Arthur lifted his brows at him insolently.

"You are, as I thought, my wife's keeper. Very good. I merely want her to realize just what I owe her."

Again his bright, flickering eyes sought Janet.

"Take a good look at me," he said to her, his lip twisted horribly in a one-sided smile. "Take a *long* look at me! You've turned the trick that's finished me. You'll go scot-free, of course, because you've aided what they call justice! Bless you, I'm glad enough of that! You were only a cat's-paw, and a damn poor one, yet I don't intend your night's sleep to be quite comfort-

able, my dear!" he drawled. "Do you know where they'll send me?"

Janet was only a wraith of a woman as she crept nearer and held out her hands to him pityingly.

"Oh, I never meant to do this!" she said. "I wanted you to give up your scheme, Arthur! When you wouldn't do that, I hoped you'd have to go to-night without the jewels. I meant to keep you from getting them, but I never dreamed that you wouldn't go away from here—free!"

"Thanks, my dear—sweet of you!" he jeered. "Still—see where you've landed me. Ten chances to one, they'll transport me to French Guiana—to Cayenne—the dry guillotine,' as it's been fittingly called. I'll drag a chain there, and sweat and sicken under a sun like brass. I'll never come back—a few years kill. So I'll die there, and they'll throw my dead body to the sharks, which is all the burial the convicts have. And *this* I'll owe to you—Cayenne!"

A loud, harsh laugh from the countess came startlingly on the heels of this plea.

"Graphic! For myself, I rather enjoy the picture!" she cried. "How better could the swine of society be treated?"

The words had such an infuriating effect on Arthur that he turned on her with a snarl that was like a dangerous dog's.

"Swine?" he exclaimed, in a trembling voice. "Madame la comtesse, you have named *yourself*." He looked at her with contemptuous, appraising eyes as she sprawled ungracefully. "I have often wondered how *you* could be a countess! You have every earmark of the vulgarian. All your make-up—false hair, finery, jewels—never hid from me that you are the sow's ear that nothing can turn into the silk purse." His voice showed a deeper venom, as he added: "The explanation is probably this—Count Lamballicu must have married *his* cook!"

The countess sprang up and made a mocking obeisance to the count. Her loud laughter was a contortion.

"Voilà!" she cried to him. "You've scored one against me here. He thought you an actual nobleman! Oh, *mon Dieu*!"

Arthur was as plainly mystified as Janet. The confusion grew deeper as Hugh took control of the situation. He seized the countess' arm, and looked at her sternly. Then he uttered some amazing words:

"Madame Rodosky, permission was given to the prisoner to speak to his wife—not to you. The revelations about you and your associate can wait—"

But at the name that he had uttered, a cry had broken from Arthur.

"Amadee Rodosky?" he gasped.

"At your service!" she called triumphantly, blowing some smoke over her shoulder as she arrogantly turned her back on him. "The brains of the French detective force—if I say it who should not! As you had never seen me face to face, I took hold, in person, of the scheme here to land you and your gang, and, *mon Dieu*, but I have enjoyed your love-making!"

She turned fully then, and her voice rasped in a sudden shriek:

"Take care! Don't let him lean on you!" Another shriek from her followed, as Arthur, having sagged backward between the two men who held him, gave a violent side twist. "He's up to something! Watch out!"

As the words were spoken, the "something" happened. Janet could not have told how it had come about, but in a flash, as Arthur was jerked back from his fall against the count, she saw a revolver that he had snatched from the count's coat gripped between his manacled hands. He pushed this into the faces of his captors. There was a momentary surprise as the strange man groped for his pistol. In those few seconds, Arthur, with a hideously dexterous twist, had broken from them. As he moved backward toward the window, he sent shot after shot toward the group of men. Their shots answered his, but without effect. He was victor. He flashed into the darkness and the storm, and they after him.

Janet found Hugh standing beside

her, his arm around her. She saw also that he was deathly pale. Blood poured down a wounded arm, and made his left hand crimson.

"You're shot—where?" she asked, in agony.

In that extreme moment, the hysteria of suspense and fright went down in a sudden onswell of love and terror for him. She flung her arms around him. Her lips sought his frantically and with the most trembling tenderness. He held her so for a moment, their souls and bodies engulfed—all else breathlessly forgotten.

"Oh, my love—are you hurt badly?" she faltered. "What can I do, Hugh?"

"Only my shoulder," he answered. "Don't be afraid." And he added tenderly: "My poor girl—my child—my love!"

He loosened his hold on her, and with his right hand drew from his pocket a thick letter.

"I had this ready for you. Take it now. Come. Everything has been arranged for you."

He seized her hand, and, as if she were a child, she let him lead her into the hall, across a corridor, and to a stairs that she knew led to a small door at the side of the house. And all the while, far off, was heard the blare of shots.

"The motor is waiting for you just below. So is my uncle's secretary. You will be taken to Nantes in time for the last Paris train. Read this letter, and things that confuse you now will be explained. It also gives you my address in Paris—for I'll leave here at once."

"But why do you send me away like this? Let me stay and help you, now that you are hurt!" she pleaded. "Besides, as I came here in the beginning with Arthur—desperate and ready to be a thief—I'll not escape without some punishment. They'll want me. Rather than keep hiding, I'm willing to face them now. Let me stay!"

"No charge will be made against you," he explained rapidly, "so your only value would be as a witness *against* this notorious gang, of which your hus-

band is one. You would not want to do that—"

"No, no!" she said, a woman's undying pity in the tone.

"Besides," he added, "we do not need you."

He paused, and laid one hand tenderly under her chin. They were calmer now. Reality had again reared its wall between them. There was no good-by kiss.

"Janet," he said, his true eyes searching hers, "be brave. Send for me—soon."

Like a figure performing the unreal acts of a dream, she went down the stairs, through the small door, into the wind-torn snowstorm. She felt the secretary and Hugh help her into the motor—felt the last pressure of Hugh's hand—saw him turn through the storm, and run in the direction from which voices and shots still faintly sounded. She felt the motor rush her on through the black, still world, where the flakes eddied like waves in the upper air—was conscious that the secretary sat like a guardian beside her. And yet the numbness, the dreamlike obsession, continued to strap her. She was not conscious of any sensation.

This condition lasted until she stood on the platform of the station. There, as she felt the snow beating against her veiled face, watched the distant haze of light from the oncoming train, and heard its shrill, heralding whistle, a sudden overwhelming fear of danger threatening, mixed with an overwhelming longing for safety, for peace, racked her so that actuality once more was naked before her, and terror set her teeth. When the secretary spoke to her, she could not reply in words.

"You will want to travel in the women's compartment?" he asked, and she nodded.

He led her to one bearing the printed notice: "*Dames Seules*," helped her in politely, lifted his hat, and departed. As the door closed and she sank back in her corner, the thick letter gripped in her tense fingers, her veil shielding her like a canopy, the self that had just

awakened again to reality seemed to snap within her like a too-slender stem propping an overfull wineglass.

She was alone in the dimly lighted oblong, and for this her whole being melted in a feeling of thankfulness. Only the blunting blows of time and rest could shut out from her inner hearing the wild, mixed tumult of the hours that she had just passed through—the memory of Arthur's gleaming, desperate face, wild eyes, snarling mouth—the rush of the other figures—her own look after them into the swirling darkness, of which the snow made a misty whirlpool—and then the sound of the shots. Oh, that clamor upon the dead quiet of the night!

Over and over her burning mind returned to the possible secrets of the darkness—the meaning of the shots. They might have meant so many things—a fusillade, under which Arthur had managed to escape, with perhaps no one hurt. Or the pursuers might have been wounded, even killed—perhaps—Hugh! The last thought was piercing. At its recurrence, she unconsciously gripped her knees and moaned aloud. If that night's perilous work should eventually bring death to Hugh!

The thought that Arthur might have died in that last rush, like a wild torch, obstinately flaring, blown out in a tempest, had no horror. Better that than the slow death in Cayenne, of which he had spoken. And, even if he escaped now, always in the future there would wait for him, in whatever land he might find shelter—Cayenne or its equivalent. For in Arthur there was no change! If he had escaped, she wished him success in his flight; if he were dead, she felt no sorrow; the visualization of his capture, his imprisonment, his trial, his deportation to long agony and isolation under an equatorial sun, was the thing that sickened her!

A moment before the train gave the first premonitory tremble of departure, a guard pulled the door open, and she heard him speak:

"Enter here, madame. This is for ladies alone. Enter here."

A woman in black came laboriously

in, breathless, half stumbling. She was a stout, old woman, her fur cloak a cumbersome one, a thick, gray veil falling from a sensible-looking, almost bare bonnet. She had been hurried, and was perspiring; and she sank like a heavy cargo into the corner of the seat at the other end of the car, opposite Janet. In the interval during which the train was jolting and whistling, she kept up a heavy gasping, broken at moments by guttural exclamations in French:

"Ah, merciful God! What a pest this hurrying— Ah, plague on it, I've forgotten the basket! Oh, how I drip—devil take it! Hurrying—and with so much time to spare!"

Eventually, her mumbling ceased. She gave herself a shake and settled herself for sleep. The train was now rushing steadily on its way. The directness of its movement out into the big, wide, waiting world, had a sooth-ing effect on Janet's nerves. As her heart calmed, the letter in her hand took on a significance that sent a trem-bling feeling of ecstasy through her. This was Hugh's last word to her—his good-by. Ah, it was a bit of his very self that she was carrying into the wilderness!

She was glad when the old woman began to snore—the sound detached her so from Janet that she felt herself really alone in the car. She lifted her veil, arranged it around her head, wiped her face, and drew off her gloves slowly. Then she lifted Hugh's letter, and kissed it with such tenderness that her heart failed her a little and the tears came. As she opened it, the words danced before her grotesquely large, for her tears were like the lens of a magnifying glass. Her name at its beginning flared at her like a written cry:

MY DEAR JANET, MY VERY DEAR JANET: You must let me call you this—

She had read this far only when she saw that within the large envelope, and separate from the letter, there was a thick, mauve-pink pamphlet. Her heart seemed to stop beating as she drew this out—there was no mistaking the strange color of the French money. Yes, it

was a compact little sheaf of hundred-franc notes, perhaps twenty of them.

The sight stunned her for a moment; then, gasping, she half struggled up. The money fell to the floor, and she seized the letter:

... You must let me call you this. Whatever comes, you are to me the very dearest thing in life. I have only a few moments in which to write to you, but I shall try to have you understand me completely.

My aunt and uncle—Comte and Comtesse Lamballieu—were in Venice when Newell first appeared at the château as a friend of the lost brother, Pierre. Owing to their former narrow escapes from robbery, they became suspicious of him and at once got into communication with the Italian detective force, and through that with the French.

A scheme was built up, as carefully as a house, stone by stone. It was arranged that the great woman detective, Amadee Rodosky, should impersonate my aunt; and Leon Ricard, the man with one of the longest lists of criminal detections to his credit, my uncle. The real jewels were brought from Italy by the secretary. All of this was done prior to inviting Newell to The Gulls.

In the meantime, coming from Egypt, I had stopped over in Venice with my aunt and uncle. There my part in the play, soon to be staged and acted at the old château, was carefully gone over.

When Newell, before my arrival, had suggested you as companion to the supposed countess, you were sent for. The detectives believed you an accomplice—or more definitely, a tool of his—as you were.

I will never forget my first sight of you. I had expected a type that would have fitted in with the opinion I had formed of you, and instead you made me think of a maltreated flower, stained by the mischance of a muddy boot. I could not believe you a practiced criminal. Soon I had found out all about you—except that you were Newell's wife. This was not known in the world of studios in the Quartier. But I learned of your desperate efforts to paint; to find work at anything—typewriting, translating, selling goods over the counters of the big shops!

I began to realize how this man—brother, or lover, or even old friend as he had said—had gradually come to tempt you to share his crime. I soon saw, too, how utterly miserable you were, how you were trying to draw out, and how you could not. By disguising myself as a priest, so that, if seen, I would be thought to be Newell's pal, Ricet, I kept well informed. In this character I visited the office where the warning was typewritten, and read scraps of it that you had discarded. You see how well I came to know the secret workings of your torn heart?

The coffee was not drugged. We had feared some such attempt as this, and the

butler—in reality a secret-service man—had a *cafetière* containing an unadulterated substitute ready at hand.

Don't hesitate, I implore you, as a friend, as a man who stands close to you in the human, brotherly way, to use the two thousand francs that I am inclosing. You have really earned it by the help you have given. I have a feeling that the money that I gave the supposed count to give to you as a Christmas gift, you will leave behind you—that, indifferent to possible disaster, you will rush out to face fate, almost penniless, helpless. My sweet Janet—I have no absolute right to call you that, I know, yet to me you must always, in my secret heart, be that—*use this money!* Let it be as if, through it, you were holding to my hand over a rough road.

On the card inclosed you will find an address in Paris that will reach me. Write me there. I will write to you, or go to you later. As long as I live—

She had read to this broken phrase—when the roof of the car seemed to crash upon her! For a few seconds, she could not focus or comprehend; then she realized that the old woman had sprung upon her as a python springs. Both large hands were grasping her wrists.

CHAPTER XIX.

The onslaught was so terrific and so utterly unexpected that Janet could only stare. Her voice was gone. Strength and sense seemed rushing from her body like the first lines of a defeated army.

"Lucky to the last, my dear—lucky to the last!"

The old woman's veil was flung back now, and she saw Arthur's face, only an inch from her own. It was a terrible face—soiled and bloody—at the corner of one eye the torn flesh gaping open like the flap of an envelope. She became conscious that a feeling of *waiting* had descended upon her—a feeling of utter finality. That he would kill her seemed not to admit of the smallest question.

"They weren't as clever as they imagined, you see," he chuckled straight into her face; "nor were you! They had not tapped all our resources—not even with you, as a snake in the grass, to help them! You see?" he muttered, writhing his hands triumphantly. "We

have ways of unlocking even the government's cumbersome bracelets! Ah —you *see*?"

For some seconds that seemed like a long, ominous pause, he looked down into her eyes, his own filled with a silent malignity that gave her a feeling of strangulation.

"I ought to kill you," he said, and the tone was amazingly soft, considering the words. "I wonder why I don't? I ought to just grip your throat in my fingers and quiet you—to *stay*. But on second thought—why bother? I've done with you forever—in fact, I feel the Antipodes calling to me for good and all. Besides—back in the past I didn't play square with you. I'm a good gambler. Suppose I close the deal by giving you your miserable life? Suppose I do?"

She could make no answer. He enjoyed torturing her, trailing his half-clutching fingers over her stiffened face and watching eyes.

"I will!" he added, with a sneering decision. "So, while I take your love letter to beguile the rest of my journey, and while I take your kind friend's money to buy me good things en route—understand that I, who could have put out your life as easily as blowing out a candle—give it to you!" He rose, and pushed her venomously into the corner, his hand pressing viciously upon her throat. "I, whom you sold, give you your life—remember that!"

He had picked up the money and pocketed it with the letter before she was able to speak. Her voice came at last in hoarse spurts.

"Arthur! Arthur! I urged you—you remember? I wanted you to give it up!" she cried wildly. "I didn't mean you to be caught! I meant to go with you—but without the jewels!"

The locomotive gave out the long screech that told that they were nearing a station. Arthur was close to the door, the veil again over his face. Janet bent forward, and flung her arms about his knees.

"Keep the money, but give me that letter!" she prayed wildly.

He unwound her arms from him as if she had been a snake.

"Keep quiet!"

"Give me the letter! Or—if you won't—let me see the address that's given—"

He gave a laugh of the most intense satisfaction.

"Am I spoiling an impending tête-à-tête? 'Write to me, my darling,' " he mimicked, " 'to the address inclosed —' Have I got *that* much on you? Good!"

Lights streaked the stormy thickness outside the windows. The sight made Janet desperate. With the letter gone, she was like the drowning whose life raft has been snatched; the waters were rising and soon would close over her!

"Arthur, have a little pity! Give me the letter—or let me see it!"

Her touch maddened him, and he fairly lifted her from her feet and flung her into the seat.

"Listen to me," he said through the veil and in the smallest and iciest of voices. "We are coming into Angers. That door will be opened in a moment. If you speak, if you make a sound, it's the end of us both. They'll never take me. I'll kill myself—and you'll go with me. Your chance for life is—silence."

But whether she would or would not speak was decided for her by that which was stronger than herself. Abruptly, the dimly lighted compartment, and Arthur's menacing figure, and the light-streaked darkness—all began to disappear. A feeling, unique and awful, seemed to seize her and send her pivoting into space. She tried to reach up toward the window, beyond which the cries of the guard, calling "Angers," were now heard, but the window, too, disappeared before her open eyes. She fainted.

In the corner nearest the door she was crouched, her shoulders sagging sideways, so that her body lay at a crooked angle. Arthur gave her one keen look, straightened her, and dropped her veil over her face. The door was opened, the guard cried, "Angers! All descend for Angers!"

Wheezing audibly, moving his body

cumbersomely under the wide cloak that gave an impression of girth, Arthur stepped out. The door was closed. Janet sat in the corner stiffly, like the dead. There was a brief wait, a shriek from the locomotive, a rattle, a lunge.

The train was off again, carrying her on to Paris.

CHAPTER XX.

A feeling that sunlight was flickering on her eyes; the rich, rolling music of a distant organ; the laughter of children—these were the chords to which Janet's sense of things vibrated once more in a tangible and visible world.

She could feel that it was an effort to open her eyes. The eyes seemed scarcely to belong to her. Nor did the hand that she lifted slowly and looked at as babies are wont to examine their fingers with a mild, judicial, wholly detached scrutiny.

How big and hollow her eyes felt, as she winked! What a snowy, thin, almost transparent hand it was! To whom did the eyes and the hand belong? Where was she? *Who* was she? Again that swell of organ music; again the laughter of the children; again the sunlight calling her to turn.

In the weariest, most labored way, she moved her head on the pillow and saw beside her a sister of charity. Beyond her, she saw long, shining windows, and a view of a yard in which little children were playing.

The sister of charity took her hand and patted it, her beneficent face filled with a mellow radiance that made Janet think of a sunset over garnered sheaves in autumn.

"My dear," the nurse murmured, "how glad I am to see you smile at me!"

"I have been ill," Janet began, and marveled at the faintness of her voice and at the difficulty of speech. "Will you tell me, please—"

"Nothing, now," the woman whispered consolingly. "Nor is it necessary. All you must do now is to sip this milk the attendant is bringing, and sleep again. After that, we'll talk."

Gentle as the voice was, it had the inflection of one that was always unquestioningly obeyed. Janet found herself sipping the creamy milk. Then, somehow, she felt as if she had walked a long, long distance, and was still very tired. The music grew very faint—the children's voices seemed to be as distant as the rim of the world; and, suffused in the exultation of supreme weakness, she drifted again into sleep.

"She is going to get well," said the nurse, her face, within its frame of fluted, white coif, beaming with a mild happiness.

It was night when Janet again opened her eyes. Not far from her bed, a tiny spirit lamp burned under a green shade. She was dimly aware of a watching figure in a deep armchair, near the door. But the nurse was nodding; and the place was as silent as the interior of a tomb. In contrast to this, Janet's brain became acutely vivid, her thoughts burning.

She had, to a degree, "found" herself. This place was a hospital; she had been very ill. Having mastered this item fully, her mind went forward. What was waiting for her, with health, after she left the hospital? No answer came to this—no picture of some home ready for her—or of the faces of friends—*nothing!* Shipwrecked, and with no future, she sent her thoughts backward to what occurrences in the past had whirled her to this bed among strangers.

Ah, that was an easier task! One picture after another stole from the haze and quivered before her weak but rapacious consciousness. One after the other—as she lay rigidly on the severely plain bed, her dilating eyes fastened on the hazy disk of the night light on the whitewashed ceiling—they unrolled before her memory in a succession of scenes that fell like blows upon her spirit.

She saw them all—even the very last: Herself and Arthur, in his grotesque disguise—the dimly lighted railway compartment—she upon her knees pleading for something—and then his

hands brutally seizing her and flinging her from him. After that, oblivion!

And what had she prayed him so passionately to give her? What was it that vaguely some subconscious self still felt defrauded of, and still craved? It had to do with Hugh—that she knew. But—what?

Wearied, she gave up the quest, and lay lax and exhausted. But meanwhile the marvelous mechanism of the mind was whirring secretly of itself, picking up infinitesimal fragments of memories, bit by bit knitting them together, as surely making a fabric, in answer to Janet's former demand, as any merchant obeying the order of a buyer—and all without her knowledge of it.

Some moments later, as she lay in the semisleep of weakness, she found her question answered as fully as if a hand had written it on the air before her eyes:

"Arthur took the letter that Hugh gave you—the letter that held his address and the two thousand francs. You have not written to Hugh. Your silence has made him suppose that you accepted his money—and then deliberately disappeared—the last, disillusionizing act of the adventuress who has ceased to care about keeping up her masquerade!"

Pain caught her like a physical convulsion. She found herself upon her knees, gazing, with a feeling of utter weakness, and yet of furious panic, into the shadows of the room. Hugh must think her, after all, a thief! Hugh must probably believe that she and Arthur had escaped together! She had been unhappy before. She had suffered before. Yes—but nothing that had gone touched even the edges of the blind, furious, devouring shame that this illumination made writhe within her.

Through her suffering, she knew only one desire—to get in touch with Hugh, seek him, find him. And a feeling as strong as thirst compelled her to act at once.

A spurious strength had replaced her weakness, as well as a new, almost unnatural, capability for caution. She slipped from the bed, and looked

searchingly around the big room. In one corner stood a large wardrobe—her clothes would be in that. She would dress without waking the nurse. She would go out secretly as soon as daylight showed and make her way to Nantes, then to the little inn where Hugh and she had lunched on the wonderful day when he had told her that he loved her. Once there, she would either find him at the château, or learn his whereabouts.

But even as she opened the wardrobe and saw her clothes ready to her hand, she sank back in weakness against the wall, drawing the small door with her. *Money?* She could do nothing without it. The small amount that had been in her chatelaine when she had prepared to leave the château would have sufficed for the journey back. But where was it? Placed somewhere for safe-keeping beyond her reach now! She did not know that a weak, mumbling sound of defeat had wavered through her lips until she saw the nurse rise out of her sleep and come confusedly toward her.

"My child!" the sister exclaimed, seizing her in a tender dismay. "What are you doing? Come back to bed at once!"

Janet clung to her fiercely.

"I will—if you will help me. Oh, I am so unhappy, sister! My heart is breaking. I have thought of something that terrifies me. I want to leave here—to go as soon as I can and set it right!"

"You shall!" The nurse was leading her back to bed, soothing her gently as they crossed the floor. "I will listen to you now. You shall tell me all that's in your heart. You shall tell me what disturbs you so terribly. I will help you—whatever it is."

Cold, and trembling in the storm that tore through her, Janet crept back to bed. But she would not let the nurse move from her side. Her fever-wan eyes clung to her face.

"I want to get word to a friend—at once. Oh, at once!" she pleaded. "Perhaps I am not strong enough to go to him. But—will you find him for me—ask him to come here?" Her voice

choked. "Can you imagine the agony of having one that you love believe you unworthy—cheap, horrible, a liar, a hardened swindler? Oh, nurse," she moaned, "I cannot live! A stone is pressing me down! Find him for me—find him, please—when daylight comes!"

The sister's arms were like a mother's around the tossing, clinging body grown so slender; her eyes dwelt in compassion on the girl's praying, distracted face.

"Perhaps," she said, lifting one of the moist, flaming tendrils from Janet's brow, "you will not need to seek him. Perhaps soon after daylight he will come to you."

"You mean—*Who?*" was the small, bodiless whisper that beat against her ear.

"Monsieur Hugh Maxwell," the nurse whispered back, smiling. "Is it not he whom you would seek, my child?"

Janet crept closer to her. A terror that she was dreaming, that she had not really heard these words, made her seize the nurse's hand and clutch gropingly at it.

"Yes—yes," she said, in an ecstatic faintness. "Tell me—"

"Very good. Now be quiet, and you shall hear."

The nurse laid her with gentle decision back among the pillows and drew her chair close to the bed.

"You were brought here more than a month ago—"

"A month!" was Janet's dismayed whisper.

"In a train that passed through Nantes, Angers, and Le Mars, and reached Paris in the early morning, you were found unconscious. As you were so young, alone, and visibly a lady, you were brought here—as is the case sometimes—instead of to one of the big, public hospitals. You were suffering from a complete breakdown, which became brain fever. You had been here perhaps a week or so when the gentleman I speak of arrived—"

"How had he heard?" Janet asked, as she listened in breathless wonder.

"He had not heard. He was searching for you. For some reason, he believed that you had met with harm."

"He did not doubt, then!" was Janet's glorifying thought. "No, he did not doubt me!"

Joy and peace began to creep into her heart.

"Since that first day, he has come every evening, for an exact report of your progress. He had you placed in this private room. He wanted to send you delicacies, flowers, but I told him to wait until you were conscious and convalescent."

"Was he well? How did he look?" asked Janet, her heart going out to the bare thought of Hugh.

"He was well—and, oh, a grand gentleman, indeed," said the nurse, "but torn with terrible anxiety for you. His eyes, filled with fear, would question me each day, before his lips could frame one word. Yesterday, I wrote him that he could see you."

"When?" It was all that Janet could ask. A blissful happiness was swathing her, that supreme feeling of well-being that, though voiceless, cries: "*God's in His heaven! All's right with the world!*"

"This very morning—early," the woman answered, pointing to the long windows that were drab with the dawn. "And, see—the day has come! So—wait tranquilly!"

She settled Janet in bed again, spreading the shining, disordered hair like a web over the pillow. Janet caught her hand and kissed it.

"Ah, sister, I was close to running away from what I desire most on earth!"

She fell asleep, this thought with her. Yes, it was her most burning wish—to see Hugh. Not that she foresaw anything fruitful in life's happenings to come of the meeting. She wanted to see him and hear from his own lips of his faith in her. She wanted to know what news he had of Arthur—of his escape or capture. She wanted to hear him promise that he would come often to see her and befriend her until she was able to fight alone. When all this was

done, she would have earned strength again to say the inevitable good-by to him.

It was all different when he entered. Love is neither a statistician nor a reckoner. He is more than apt to be lawless, a red rebel, who leaps barriers.

Hugh came into the hospital room. Like Elaine upon her barge, Janet lay. It moved him to see how she was whiter than milk, wan, wistful, blue hollows under her ocean-blue eyes, damp rings of radiant hair clinging to her forehead!

He bent over her. Color flashed in a swift wave over her face; their eyes clung.

Without permitting a word of protest, he put his arms around her, kissed her lips, her eyelids; then her lips again.

"If I had lost you, Janet! Oh, do you hear—do you *feel* what I mean? Oh, my love—if I had lost you!"

She was too breathless, too happy, too full of wonder, to speak of their love's futility, to ask a single question. He forestalled all need of it. With his arms about her, he whispered:

"You'll want to hear about—Newell. He got away as far as London. He was taking ship there for Buenos Aires—he and a woman companion—no other, indeed, than poor, infatuated Katia, who had somehow traced him. Yes, she was going with him. Well," Hugh went on, smoothing Janet's hand, "he failed. He was not only wanted for the attempt to rob the château; there were other counts hanging over him and his gang. He couldn't elude Scotland Yard."

"Taken!" Janet gasped, a long shudder going through her.

"No—a bullet ended the game for him—his own or a detective's is not clear. Better so!"

For a moment, the pall of his fate hung over her. Her heart felt a muf-

fling sense of pity for the dead. He had not killed her when he might, even though he knew that she had tried to defeat him. Besides, he had had a magnificent recklessness, a wild freedom, about him that made the idea of captivity and slavery for him more awful than death—the feeling that one has for a lion, caged.

"Yes, better so!" she murmured.

"Katia," said Hugh, "went on alone to Buenos Aires—to begin again there. I gave her some credentials. The poor soul had really loved him. Her hopes are now centered on life in the new land."

A wonderful hour followed. Hugh talked of their plans. He was leaving for the Northwest, and she would go with him as soon as she was strong. The organ crooned softly in the distance; the little, convalescent children played in the hospital yard.

"Oh," Hugh breathed, drinking in the rapt beauty of her pale face with his ardent eyes, "you are what I've dreamed of since boyhood, Janet, and never hoped to find!"

"I have been weak and sinful," she faltered, turning her face to the shelter of his breast. "God is too merciful to me. I don't deserve you, Hugh."

He laughed softly into her ear with the deepest tenderness.

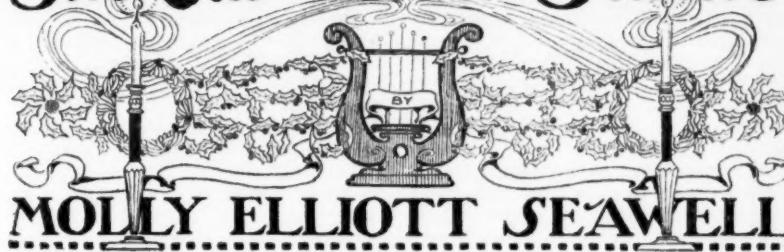
"You have that best sort of goodness—bent by the storms of temptation, it wavered, only to straighten and grow strong. Untempted purity is negative. I love you for the weakness that became your strength. You are all that I have missed upon this earth! Don't you want me?" he asked wistfully.

At this, a cry swept up from Janet's very heart.

"I want you, Hugh," she whispered, "to live with—to die with!"



The Cat and the Fiddle



THE BLACK CAT, a cheerful, dirty, agreeable place on the left bank of the Seine, was the favorite resort of the poets and literati in the Latin Quarter. So many of these gentry frequented the place that it arrogated to itself a transcendent literary privilege. This was the election, once a year, of a king of all the poets in the Latin Quarter. Of course, this meant the king of all the poets in Paris; equally, the king of all the poets in Paris must be the king of all the poets in France; and the king of all the poets in France must be the king of all the poets in the civilized world.

The patrons of the Black Cat took their responsibility seriously, and spent the last six months of every year in wrangling over the merits of the king to be elected, and the next six months in quarreling and fighting duels over the demerits of the king elected.

The Black Cat had certain advantages of situation. Directly across the street was the Fiddle, the name given in the Latin Quarter to the police station. On Saturday nights it was a regular part of the entertainment at the Black Cat to watch the crowd of "arrests" taken into the Fiddle, where they enjoyed the hospitality of the municipality for the night. At six o'clock on Sunday mornings those who could afford a couple of francs, which was the usual fine, or who had friends or relatives capable of producing this sum, were turned loose.

Saturday night at the Black Cat

lasted until six o'clock Sunday morning. Thus the sweet and solemn call of the Angelus bell, in a dismal little old church jammed up against the Fiddle, was the signal for the crowd of revelers to pour into the street and watch the guests of the city make their adieus to its guardians. The guests generally gave profuse thanks for their entertainment, and promised the police, who grinned good-naturedly, to repeat the visit shortly.

A large proportion of the persons waiting on the sidewalk were merry young ladies, officially known as housekeepers, and unofficially as "grasshoppers," whose protectors had been run in for the night. These girls, with gay, painted faces, and cheap finery, chatted and giggled and nudged one another as they made their way to the window and paid the two francs. Each one boasted that she had pawned her best gown or hat, or whatever it might be, to get her friend out, there being sharp rivalry in matters of devotion on the part of these young ladies, who, like the grasshoppers, sang all the summer, and thought not of the winter.

Then there were angry fathers and weeping mothers to take charge of their darling boys, and to reproach them bitterly. The grasshoppers never made any reproaches when their friends came out into the morning light with their hats smashed, their collars disheveled, and all the marks upon them of a night spent in the Fiddle. However, the weeping mothers frequently haled their

disheveled boys around the corner to the little church, where, on their knees in the gloom, the boys faithfully promised never, never to misbehave themselves again as long as they lived. This grew to be quite a custom at the Fiddle, and it became a part of the show that the drunks and disorderlies should be marched off to the church direct from the Fiddle.

This struck the fancy of the grasshoppers as so amusing, that they, too, dragged their friends off to the church, accompanied by a cheering, jeering mob from the Black Cat. The poets and literati, some of whom occasionally spent a night in the Fiddle, skipped arm in arm with grasshoppers, or tearful mothers and irate fathers, often to their great indignation, and sometimes to their huge delight. Generally, they danced the cancan on their way to the church, and this was danced with the sonorous singing of the "*Dies illæ*" and other of the grand old Latin hymns.

It also became the fashion for each man to vociferate his penitence, and after having faithfully promised the police to make a future visit to the Fiddle, to beat his breast and swear that henceforth he would live a life like the founder of the Trappist Order. Once arrived at the church door, they found a stern young ecclesiastic and a couple of brawny policemen ready to make them behave themselves.

Equally, it became the fashion to change suddenly into great propriety and devoutness while in the church. The merry, painted girls and the laughing, disheveled young men might have been taken for Benedictine nuns and Trappist monks, so devout were they. Above the altar hung a great, dusky picture of the Madonna with the Child Jesus on her breast. Only the faces of the Mother and Child could be clearly seen in the light of the two flickering candles on the altar and the swinging sanctuary lamp, but a Presence shadowed and sanctified the place. So great is the psychic power of devotion that many of these heedless young creatures were actually good and pure for a little while in the still, darkened little church.

Once outside, however, they resumed their antics, and generally wound up by a breakfast on credit at the Black Cat.

Although patronized wholly by poets and literati, the Black Cat made money, and the proprietor, Monsieur Lasalle, had a little country house—which bore the magnificent name of the Villa Splendide—besides an apartment across the bridges, and could afford to job a carriage. This miracle was explained by the fact that Monsieur Lasalle, a big, handsome, futile man, bothered himself very little about the Black Cat, except to pose as the proprietor and the patron of poets. The actual management was in the hands of the head waiter, Felix Lenoir, a small, meek, shabby man, sallow-skinned and lanky-haired, who worked early and late, year in and year out, and who took his few hours of sleep on a hard little bed in a dark little room on the top floor of the building, and who served Lasalle as soldiers serve their chiefs, and are decorated for it with the Order of Tried Bravery.

Felix Lenoir knew what it was to go hungry, because he had not time to eat, and to stand smiling when his poor, tired legs were bending under him, and to make up out of his poor wages bad debts which he had allowed the literati to incur at the Black Cat. The great reward he got for this was that at every election one or two votes were cast for him as king of the poets, which invariably caused a storm of laughter. On those occasions, Felix, blushing and resisting, would be dragged forward and made the object of many excellent jokes, and would have his picture drawn by some of the artists present; for the Black Cat cherished the fine arts as well as literature.

There was but one secret in Felix Lenoir's simple, laborious life. This was contained in a little locked desk, which held poems written by him secretly and shamefacedly. In the occasional hours when he found himself alone and at leisure in his little aerie under the roof, he felt a strange passion of anticipated joy, which was almost happiness in itself. The dull little room became glorified. From one narrow

window was visible a patch of sky, across which the swallows darted, their glossy black breasts shining in the sun. Sometimes the wintry clouds scurried across the piece of sky, and again a star scintillated and quivered as if for Felix alone. To him, that sky represented the little scrap of heaven that is found in every human life.

Felix Lenoir, though a head waiter, was a man, and longed for the soft smile of a woman's face bent upon him. But he had neither time nor money to woo women, and none of those in the neighborhood of the Black Cat had faces with the angelic expression that Felix imagined in his waking and sleeping dreams, and, as he said to himself:

"What woman with a face such as that of which I dream would look at a head waiter? Go to, Felix; you are an ass!"

One golden Sunday in May, in the early afternoon, when there was the usual lull in business at the Black Cat, Felix sat at his window, writing. His manuscript, after being much blotted and interlined, was finally finished, and Felix made a clean copy of the poem, twenty lines in all. It was addressed to a dream face that he had imagined in the church, and the idea was that heaven shone from within those eyes.

When he had written it out neatly, he read it over with secret joy. Then, before his very eyes, the sheet suddenly vanished. A vagrant wind had rushed into the little street, and, scurrying past Felix's window, had seized the poem, and dashed off, shrieking with laughter, as poor Felix thought. He saw the paper high up in the blue air, and then it was gone. But the poetry remained in Felix's heart just as a lark may be heard singing far out of sight in the sky. Felix was sitting down at his writing table to make another copy of his poem, when Auguste, his second in command, dashed into the room.

"Come downstairs at once!" shouted Auguste. "The poets have broken loose and are playing the devil in the garden—drinking toasts, and smashing the glasses afterward. And God knows

how hard it is to get payment out of a poet!"

Felix ran down as fast as his legs would carry him, and found that a sudden irruption had occurred in the little garden of the café. There was much shouting and singing and spouting of poetry, the ringleader being Raymond d'Artigny, the reigning king of the poets for that year. Felix loved Raymond for his beauty, his gallantry, his rich voice, his brilliant smile, his ineffable impudence, the charm of his verses, printed in a cheap newspaper, and copied in all the best newspapers in Paris. And Raymond loved Felix, and showed it by tweaking his ears, and buffeting him amiably, and always giving him a vote for king of the poets.

Raymond, surrounded by a noisy, laughing, chaffing crew, pointed with pride to a mass of broken glass in the middle of the table.

"Look you, Felix," he cried, "this glass was broken in honor of the unknown—a girl with an angel face—whom we passed just now as she came tripping down the church steps. We drank her health, and then determined that the glasses should never be used for any other purpose. So there they are. You may charge them to my account."

"But," said poor Felix, trying to smile, "it will make a considerable item, Monsieur Raymond, and Monsieur Lasalle will hold me accountable for it."

"That's all right," responded Raymond airily, and began to sing a song about what joy one might find in love and wine.

Felix was stammering out a protest against breaking the glasses, but was cut short by Raymond, who pulled poor Felix's straight, thin, black hair.

"See here, my good fellow," he said, "we can't be interrupted now in the most serious business of the whole year, not only to ourselves, but to the Black Cat, to the Latin Quarter, to Paris, to France—What do I say? To the whole world. The election of the king of the poets comes off the thirty-first of next December, and it will take us from

now until then to weigh the merits of all the poets, yourself included. When that is done, we will consider the payment of these glasses."

"It is now May," said Felix, with a wry smile, "and do you mean you will not begin to consider the payment of the bill until the thirty-first of December? Is that it?"

"Precisely," replied Raymond, flourishing his arms. "I always said, Felix, that you were a person of discernment above your calling. And, besides, it is most ungrateful of you ever to ask any of us to pay a bill here, because you know that at every election some of us have cast a complimentary vote for you as king of the poets. You are the only head waiter in Paris who has ever enjoyed such an honor."

"I did not think it was meant as an honor," said Felix, blushing all over his sallow face. "I thought that you were simply making game of me."

"What if we were?" cried Raymond, pounding the table and laughing, his white teeth showing under his short black mustache, his dark eyes glowing. "It is an honor to be made game of by an immortal! The people whom Dante Alighieri put in purgatory and hell were immortalized! There was but one Dante Alighieri in Florence, but at the Black Cat, yes, in this very garden at this moment, there are a dozen Dantes!"

This sentiment was received with roars of applause, and one of the crowd, proposing the health of Dante, declared that if he were living, he would be worthy to be classed with the best poets of the Black Cat—nay, even Raymond d'Artigny himself. When this toast was drunk, all the glasses were smashed again, in honor of the poet and ward politician.

The under waiters, none of whom had any responsibility for the broken glass, laughed openly at the excellent jokes of the poets. The waiters did not know that Dante was dead, but Felix knew it, as he knew many things that he was careful to conceal about poets.

"Don't be uneasy, my good Felix!" shouted Raymond. "You take care of

that pile of broken glass, and in less than five years you will be able to sell the pieces of it for a hundred francs each as a relic of the poets at the Black Cat."

With this Felix had to be satisfied for the present, and to making up his mind to watch the cheap newspapers; for these young men occasionally had verses and articles printed, and as soon as Felix saw a poem or an article by a patron of the Black Cat, he knew that it was an auspicious time to ask for a small unpaid account.

Felix lived in a state of exaltation all that day, and for some days afterward, thinking about his poem. He even had dreams of sending it to a newspaper or a magazine, but concluded that the chance of publication was too slim to justify the postage. Still, the poem dwelt in the heart of Felix all the bright summer and into the gloomy autumn.

Meanwhile, the election of a poet for the coming year was growing to be the overwhelming question at the Black Cat, and so many duels were fought about it that Felix really began to be afraid somebody would get hurt. Usually, by the first of December, the different candidates and their parties were well aligned, but it seemed this year as if there would be twenty kings of poetry, or none at all.

Felix was country bred, but, of course, owing to the cost of Lasalle's Villa Splendide, Felix had neither the time nor the money to go to the country. The nearest thing to it was to go, on murky December afternoons, to a flower shop near by, where, standing on the sidewalk, he could feast his eyes on the roses and the lilies and the tulips in the window. They were so alluring; like fascinating women, their beauty and their fragrance enthralled the souls of men.

One afternoon he saw in one corner of the window a tall and slender bush of white lilacs. A dream rushed over Felix—somewhere in the world was a woman, fair and pure and sweet as white lilacs. But she was not for him—white lilacs and head waiters do not go on four legs, Felix thought in his

humble heart. But it brought back the memory of a lilac bush in the vegetable garden of the Breton farmhouse where he had been born and reared. He recalled himself, a little, thin boy—for he had always been thin—lying on his back on the grass, and his mother, a hard-handed, big-waisted, soft-eyed peasant woman, coming and playfully tickling him and making him roll over and laugh on the soft, green earth. Then it was that he lived over the drama of his childish days.

But his eyes fell upon a real drama being played close by. On the pavement, before a tall old lodging house across the way, was a pile of furniture belonging to a dispossessed tenant, and around it was gathered the miscellaneous crowd that attends such sales in the Latin Quarter. It was made up of sharp-eyed men and women dealers in secondhand furniture, and the ever-present students and grasshoppers looking for bargains or amusement, because these little events in the Latin Quarter are not always taken with great seriousness. The furniture generally brings all it is worth, and the tenants, if of a careless turn of mind, get some ready cash and go to another place for a sojourn of uncertain length.

On this occasion, the bidding promised to be particularly spirited, and Felix recognized Raymond d'Artigny and several patrons of the Black Cat among the bidders. The furniture was of a different sort from that usually sold. It was painted white, and there were cheap, but spotless, muslin curtains draped over the dressing table, and the little knickknacks that women accumulate were dainty.

Felix's eye sought the owner, expecting to see a pretty, painted creature, extolling the cost and merits of her belongings, and by adroitly working upon the sympathy and cupidity of the crowd, getting a trifle more than the things cost. There was no owner in sight, but when he crossed the street Felix noticed, just within the dark doorway, a figure that he knew to be the dispossessed tenant. She sat on a little stool, her face hidden upon her slender,

outstretched arms, her hat lying on the ground, her rich hair disheveled and hanging down her back, and she was sobbing convulsively. Felix assumed that she was a grasshopper; but, grasshopper or not, he longed to have the money to give her back her little sticks of furniture and her white curtains. She was bewailing them as a mother laments her children.

"Oh, my little dressing table!" she wailed. "My dear, dear little dressing table, with the curtains I made, and I went without any dinner for three days to buy them!"

So great was the noise and talk and laughter and chaffing around the goods on the sidewalk that nobody but Felix noticed the weeping girl within the doorway.

The auctioneer began his tale, and the usual ridiculous bids were made. One student offered five hundred francs for the little dressing table, because a pretty girl had once looked at herself in that glass. Another one professed a willingness to give a second five hundred francs for a dozen little books, most of them premiums at school. Raymond was examining the books, and suddenly seeing a little manuscript volume, he turned over its leaves unceremoniously. Something pasted in it struck his attention. He stopped his running fire of jokes and quips, and read for a couple of minutes. Then, raising the volume aloft, he shouted above the din:

"I will give a thousand francs for this volume, because it contains a poem of twenty lines that could not be better if it had been done by a member of the French Academy or the Poets' Club at the Black Cat. Listen, all of you who have souls!"

The auctioneer went on with his business, while a dozen youngsters and their friends gathered around Raymond, who began to read the poem. And, oh, glory! Felix heard his own poem read in Raymond's rich voice. While the reading was going on, the girl who was the dispossessed owner stopped weeping and raised her head. One look at her nunlike face filled Felix with shame

and horror at himself that ever he should have suspected her of being a grasshopper. He knew that there were but two kinds of women in the world—the good ones and the bad ones—and that generally their characters are writ large in their eyes. This girl was the soul of purity and piety, and it showed in her tear-drenched face—the face that Felix had seen in his dreams.

It was as if the charm of the poem that Raymond was declaiming thrilled her as it thrilled Felix, and, indeed, most of those who listened. When it was over, the crowd applauded, and some real bids were made for the little book. The girl began to cry again, and came out, bareheaded and sobbing, into the street.

"Please give me back my little book! It is not worth anything to anybody. It cost but half a franc, and has nothing in it but some poems I pasted or copied in it!" she cried.

The students and the young women with them stopped laughing and making their grotesque bids. Their hearts were touched. Not so the auctioneer, or the sharpers who wanted to buy the furniture. As for Raymond, the girl's aspect struck him as quickly and poignantly as it had struck poor Felix. Only, Raymond had some money, and Felix had none. Raymond had just been paid his weekly salary. He pulled out some bank notes, and said with authority:

"I will satisfy the judgment, and these things may be returned. How much is it the young lady owes?"

"Fifty-nine francs," replied the auctioneer.

"Here it is," said Raymond, counting out the money. And then, addressing the girl, he said, with a low bow: "Mademoiselle, will you allow me the privilege of carrying the dressing table back where it belongs?"

The girl, who had stopped crying, looked at him for a moment or two. Then the extent of her good fortune dawned upon her, and a brilliant smile broke over her face, which was still wet with tears.

"Thank you, monsieur," she mur-

mured, and, catching her little book, she pressed it to her heart.

The crowd, seeing that there was to be no auction, after all, quickly dispersed, except Raymond, and half a dozen students, and Felix. Each one seized a chair or a table or some other piece of furniture, and proceeded to carry it up the rickety stairs to the tiny room on the top floor, where the girl lived. On the door was painted a little sign, "Mademoiselle Renée Dupré, Teacher of Languages." That explained to Felix the books he had noticed.

Felix did his part in carrying up the furniture, and studied well the face of Mademoiselle Renée. Yes, indeed, hers was the face for which his poet's soul had been looking! It was so delicate, so spirituelle, so full of hidden fire! She thanked them timidly for their kindness, and when she attempted to thank Raymond, broke down and wept again.

"You must give me your address, monsieur," she said to Raymond. "I will send you the money in a little while; but I can never, never repay your kindness."

"Ah, mademoiselle," replied Raymond, with his captivating smile, "I do not wish you to repay me the money; I wish to have that much laid up where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal."

"But I must pay it back," said Mademoiselle Renée, with the quick conscientiousness of her kind. "And I ask you to give me your card."

"I regret," said Raymond, with a flourishing bow, "that I have not a card about me; but I will tell you who I am, if you desire. I am Kaiser Wilhelm, visiting Paris incognito, and this"—pointing to Felix—"is my imperial chancellor, Otto von Bismarck."

Then, waving his hand magnificently, Raymond proceeded to introduce the laughing crew around him.

"This is Monsieur Clémenceau, premier of France; and this is General Brugère, minister of war. Here is Professor Curie, the great discoverer of radium. Also, let me present Monsieur Sully-Prudhomme, winner of the Nobel

prize for literature, an honor scarcely inferior to the election of a king of poets in the Latin Quarter. The last king elected was Raymond d'Artigny—an excellent fellow and a sublime poet."

Cheers interrupted Raymond at this point, and Mademoiselle Renée's April face showed a smile that began with her eyes and ended with her mouth.

"You are pleased to jest, monsieur," she said. "But you have done me a kindness which will remain in my heart forever. I shall remember you in my prayers. I thank all of you for your kindness."

She looked around the little circle, and her soft eyes rested upon Felix, who had toiled upstairs half a dozen times carrying burdens.

"And especially this gentleman, who has worked so hard for me."

Felix made no pretensions to being a gentleman, but all the pieces of furniture he had carried up seemed as light as a feather when he thought of Mademoiselle Renée's soft eyes and of his poem in the little manuscript book.

"I have one favor to ask," said Raymond. "Will you permit me to make a copy of the poem in your manuscript book?"

"Rather," answered Mademoiselle Renée sweetly, and with a lovely sidelong glance all her own, "would I ask you to accept of the little book. I know all the poems in it by heart."

Raymond kissed the little book, put it in his breast pocket, and made a profound bow.

"It shall remain with me as long as I live," he said, "and when my chair in the French Academy is draped for my death, this book will rest upon it. Will you do me the kindness to tell me the author of the poem I read aloud just now?"

"I wish I knew," replied Mademoiselle Renée. "All I can tell you is that one day, sitting at my window and being very sad, I saw the paper lying on the window ledge, blown here by the wind. I took it up and read it, and it soothed my poor heart. Ever since, when the world has scowled at me, I have read that poem. It is so sweet!"

The heart of Felix throbbed with ecstasy; the lady of his dreams loved his poem! Was ever mortal man so blest as he!

"I shall do all I can to find the author," replied Raymond, "and if he can be discovered, I promise you he shall be elected king of the poets in the Latin Quarter, the greatest earthly honor for a poet. I have the honor to bid you good afternoon, mademoiselle."

Then all of the young men trooped down the stairs. Felix followed, and carried away in his heart the memory of the soft "thank you" of Mademoiselle Renée.

This was on a Saturday, the last Saturday but one before the thirty-first of December. By that time a hurricane of excitement raged in the Black Cat over the coming election. The whole night was consumed in fierce debate among the poets, and when the solemn bell of the Angelus sounded from without, a voice seemed to come from another world, far off and full of peace. Immediately, there was a stampede to see the Fiddle discharge its guests, and presently Felix went out, not indeed to see the sight, but to inhale a breath of the cold, pure air of the wintry dawn.

Just as he got outside, a merry little grasshopper ran up to him, and, linking her arm in his, proceeded to dance toward the church, making Felix dance, too. But, oh, misery and shame! Just as he reached the church steps, he saw Mademoiselle Renée tripping into the church, her slim figure all in black, her sweet face half hidden by a close, black veil. Felix wriggled away from the grasshopper, and, turning to look, saw Raymond doing the same ungallant thing. Each went alone into the dim church, and saw Mademoiselle Renée kneeling in a dark corner by a pillar. Her eyes, rapt and serenely soft, looked to Felix like the eyes of the pale Madonna over the altar.

Felix had a notion that Mademoiselle Renée came every morning to the little church, and he got into the evil habit of breaking his few short hours of sleep at six o'clock every morning, to be rewarded by a glimpse of Mademoiselle

Renée mounting the church steps. On the following Sunday morning, he remained in hiding until every blessed grasshopper was out of sight. So did Raymond, who thrust his tongue into his cheek, and, nudging Felix, said:

"Remember, you scoundrel, that you have never seen me speak to a grasshopper. Do you understand?"

Felix understood.

Then the time was at hand for the great election. The event was so important that on the night of Saturday, the thirty-first of December, when a minor poet at the Black Cat ventured to speak of the chances of a general European war, he was howled down, and told not to interrupt the proceedings with drivel about trifles.

The café was crowded, and the tables were set together so as to form one long table, extending from end to end of the low-ceiled room. Raymond d'Artigny, as retiring king of the poets, had the head of the table. Lasalle was on hand in evening dress, his ample white waist-coat decorated with a stupendous gold chain, which would have answered equally well for a watch or for a dog, giving orders that nobody heeded, stopping the waiters to tell them to make haste, and making himself generally important and ridiculous.

Felix scurried about, his sallow face a little paler from hard work and excitement, and his lanky hair sticking to his head with the dampness. Never was there so uproarious a night at the Black Cat, and there had been a number of uproarious nights there. Everybody shouted and nobody listened, meals were ordered and never eaten, while patrons consumed one another's drinks promiscuously.

The discussion began at midnight, and was in full blast all night. The situation was complicated by the fact that every man present was a candidate, and followed the advice of Niccolo Machiavelli, to take his own part. Raymond d'Artigny harangued, scolded, shouted, laughed, and menaced, but nobody heeded him. At last, taking off his shoe, he rapped violently with it on the table, and continued to make himself

heard. A viva-voce ballot was taken. Every man shouted out his own name for the honor of king of the poets.

"Poets," cried Raymond, "we are all great, that I admit, but we must elect a king—a worthy successor to myself! Now that Béranger and Alfred de Musset are dead, it will, of course, be a difficult task to find a fit successor to me, Raymond d'Artigny, poet and journalist. But there is a man—an unknown man, and a dweller in the Latin Quarter—who has written a poem worthy of me, of Victor Hugo, of Sully-Prudhomme, of anybody! I say he dwells in the Latin Quarter, because only among us could such a poet be found. It is unnecessary to look for great poets elsewhere."

Then Raymond, jumping on the table, took from his breast pocket the little manuscript volume given him by Mademoiselle Renée, and also a copy of a great Paris newspaper. The noise stopped, and the silence grew intense, as Raymond spoke:

"I sent this poem to the great newspapers, saying that the author was unknown. See, the newspaper has printed it, imploring the author, for the honor of French literature, to reveal himself. Listen!"

Raymond read the lines—read them with such feeling, such pathos, such exquisite intonation, that the music of his voice seemed a part of the poem, as the thrilling of the lute is a part of the song. Felix listened as in a dream.

As the last perfect line was read, a great roar of cheering and stamping broke forth.

"The unknown is king! The unknown is king!" they yelled.

Raymond, by taking off both shoes and pounding them with both hands on the table, secured a moment's lull.

"Immortals," he cried, "listen to a fellow immortal! I have this day come into a triple inheritance. I have secured the love of the lady of my heart; I have inherited a competence in fortune; and I have made known to the world the greatest poet of the Latin Quarter. I ask you to drink the health of the unknown poet in champagne."

This paralyzed the crowd; it seemed too good to be true; but when Felix and Lasalle himself began filling the extraordinary order, they believed it. Not only did every patron of the Black Cat that night drink champagne, but a wizen-faced cabman outside had his glass, and Raymond, with his own hands, poured a bottle into a pail, and, taking it out, treated the cabman's sorry horse to such a draft as he had never had before in his melancholy life, and made him frisk all over the place.

The unknown was king—that was settled. Meanwhile, the unknown went about his humble duties, cleaning up the débris and trying to get things in some sort of order. Suddenly, while the fun was still roaring, the sound of the Angelus bell from the little church boomed in the darkness outside. It was the signal for everybody to rush across the street and take part in the final ceremonies of the Fiddle.

The doors of the police station were surrounded by the usual laughing, pushing, weeping crew, and the two-franc pieces were being shoved into the little window to the guardian of the peace, who took them. The crowds, augmented by that from the Black Cat, made the narrow little street populous and hilarious. A couple of gas lamps flickered in the blackness, and a great flood of light from the windows of the café and the glaring lanterns at the Fiddle illuminated the throng.

Immediately the procession was made to the church. Two men, however, Raymond and Felix, slipped out and were waiting on the church steps. By that time, Mademoiselle Renée had appeared and passed like a shadow through the door held open by the stern-faced ecclesiastic. Directly after her went Raymond, who followed her to her place behind the pillar, and kneeled next her. In the gloom of the little church, Felix watched them, kneeling a little way off, where he could see their faces. Raymond looked at Renée with adoring eyes, and the girl looked at the altar, with a rapture of love and faith in her delicate, speaking face.

Like ghosts, the crowd from the

Black Cat and from the Fiddle moved into the church, and almost filled it. Never was there a multitude more devout, partly because they were compelled to be quiet, and partly because it was the custom, and partly because the mighty hand of mysticism was laid upon them, and the sanctuary lamp showed them the place where resided the Presence.

In the midst of the silence came the deep roll of the organ, and the choir began the Christmas hymn. It sang one verse of the hymn welcoming the Divine Child, and then sank into silence, only one voice cleaving the air with music, and singing "*Venite adoremus.*" Again the words floated out, this time with two voices, the sharp sweetness of the soprano mingling with the deeper melody of the alto. All at once the choir burst forth into a great musical cry of "*Venite adoremus! Dominum!*"

The noble hymn of joy and welcome thrilled all who heard it. There were no distinctions. Pale mothers and angry fathers were one with the painted grasshoppers, who, for one moment, became innocent women, and wore the same look upon their glorified faces, the look of the Blessed Mother who held the little Child Jesus in her arms. For a brief minute, the world and all its wickedness was forgotten in one mighty act of supreme welcome and adoration.

The organ pealed and thundered, and the choir sang on. Outside in the street, little boys shouted: "Noël! Noël!" Then came the awful moment of the elevation, when all sounds melted away into a solemn silence which lasted for a brief time. Then once more the joyous Christmas music began, and lasted until the lights were put out on the altar, and only the ever-present sanctuary lamp gleamed.

The people trooped out of the church and resumed their everyday characters. The grasshoppers were grasshoppers still, and the tipsy boys and fighting, drinking, disreputable men and women were ready to go back to their everyday employments of fighting and drinking and tippling and dancing and all manner of gay wickedness. But they had

experienced one of those moments in which all men and women are of kin, all are the children of the good God.

Mademoiselle Renée walked down the steps of the church alone; Raymond was a little way off. He would not violate propriety so much as to be seen in the street with Mademoiselle Renée, but when he took off his hat to her in the cold, gray dawn and she gave him her bewitching sidelong glance, their hearts

spoke the language known to all who love.

There was not much doing at the Black Cat, and Felix remained in the church. His heart was strangely chill, but his spirit soared like a bird. He was only a head waiter, but he had seen the lady of his dreams, and he could, if he chose, have been king of all the poets in the Latin Quarter—that is to say, of all the poets in the world.



THE ADVENTURER

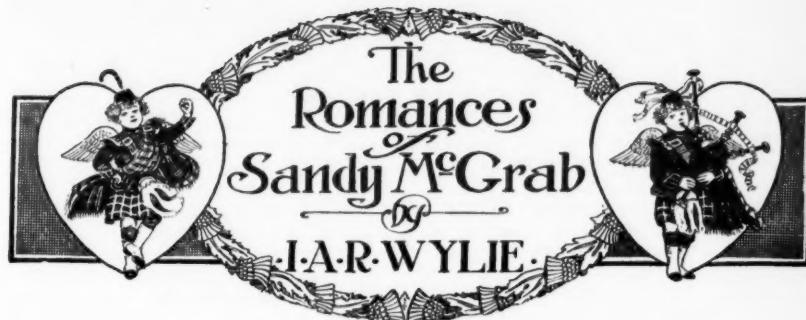
CITY of power and city of might,
Of plunder and passion and woe and delight,
The sound of your voice is a trumpeter's blare,
A challenge that's flung on the palpitant air,
A paean of battle, a taunt, and a call
To join in the conflict and conquer—or fall,
To thrust and to parry, to feint and to lunge;
So—into the tumult I plunge!

*I fear you?—the city of opulent dreams—
Because of your vastness that pulses and teems?
Why, here are my hands, they are young, they are strong
As any two hands in the thick of the throng;
And here are my eyes and my body and brain
Alert for the glory and gold I shall gain.
So—fearless I face you, O huge, roaring brute,
Besotted with splendor and glutted with loot!*

*What peril of jungle or desert or sea
Has more of a thrill than your dangers to me,
Or greater romance than the conflict that rolls
On your vast battlefield of a myriad souls?*

I cry you defiance! Your masters and slaves,
Your wasters and delvers and dreamers and knaves,
I war for your palaces, pleasures, and pelf;
I fear you no whit—for I fear not myself;
I face you and fight you, nor whimper for aid.
Since you crawl to the feet of the man unafraid!

BERTON BRALEY.



CHAPTER I.

THE SIREN AND THE SCOT.

N the Highland town of Kirk Humphries, there is a high street, and at the end of the high street a clothier where the simple Londoner buys Scotch tweeds in the hopes of currying favor with the native. There were three clothiers in Kirk Humphries, but the firm of McGrab & Son had done more in the line of gulling the credulous upstart English than the other two put together, and consequently was the most noted for its strict integrity. Not that the McGrabs were dishonest. Far from it. But they were Scotch, and their customers were English—and further explanation is superfluous.

Sandy McGrab was selling a warranted heather mixture to Sir John Hodge. Sir John Hodge—of Hodge's Patent Baby Food fame—had bought Glen Every, the McPhersons' estate on the other side of the loch, and wore kilts. During the grouse season, he cultivated a Scotch accent, and had patiently endeavored to warm his business relationship with the McPhersons to a glowing friendship—which endeavor had more than failed. The McPhersons still occupied a fragment of their ancestral dominions, lived on bread and cheese and a majestic sense of superiority, and hated the interloper with an amazing, entirely racial pertinacity. The fact that it was Hodge's English money that provided the bread

and cheese and gave sustenance to the superiority, softened them not at all. Sandy McGrab, who with the rest of Kirk Humphries took cautious sides with the ousted clan, was explaining the exact merits of the unshrinkable tweeds to Sir John's patronizing innocence.

"Ah, weel, ye can make me a shooting coat out of that," said Sir John breezily, "and damn the expense!"

Sandy bowed his customer out of the shop and watched him stride down the high street, the kilts swinging uncomfortably round his stout Saxon legs, the ribbons in his cap floating out wildly behind him. At intervals, he raised a saluting forefinger to some unresponsive vassal on his newly acquired property, and presently, laying hold of Kirk Humphries' "guardian of souls"—a meek, shabby-coated gentleman, who accepted the English invasion as a chastisement from Heaven, mercifully tempered with bawbees—carried him off in triumph.

Sandy McGrab did not smile, but he happened to catch the eye of Saunders, the rival clothier on the other side of the road, and they looked at each other long and intently. Saunders sauntered across and propped a broad shoulder against the doorway.

"There's another week to September," he said thoughtfully. "Na doot they'll be going along home soon."

"Aye," said Sandy, as one accepting consolation.

"There be twenty of them up there,"

Saunders went on, indicating the direction taken by the English baronet with a jerk of the head. "Me son James gang oot with them a week since, and twa grand royals walked away under their big noses with a wisk of the tail and a rare wink of the eye at Jamie. Jamie was no interested at the moment, for he had his knee full of London lead, but he heard the beasties whispering and laughing all down the glen. He'll no have the face to be after them again this year!"

The two men shook silently. In Sandy McGrab's eye there was an unmistakable twinkle.

"But Sir John's got the last bit of me last year's homespun," he said, as if thereby getting the laugh back on the Scotch side. "I'm to make him a shooting coat out of it, he said."

"And he canna shoot a haystack!" said Saunders, still convulsed with solemn and noiseless mirth.

"Ah, weel, he can pay for the coat," Sandy commended placidly.

The statement appeared to have a sobering influence on the elder man. He stared thoughtfully up at his own chimney pot, as if the smoke curling up into the evening sky were giving him the cue for his next remark, and his grizzled eyebrows were contracted.

"Ye be doing vurry weel for yerself, laddie," he observed, after a moment.

"It'll do," said Sandy noncommittally.

"Since the bailie, your father, deed, ye maun ha'e turned many a gold bit," Saunders persisted.

"They come and they go," said Sandy, with profound philosophy.

Saunders shook his head.

"Yet you're a young man, laddie. You'll no be wanting to sit in Kirk Humphries all the days of your life."

"There's the shop," said Sandy.

He had colored up, however, and his expression was less determinedly expressionless. Saunders followed the smoke till it lost itself in the sapphire blue.

"The shop's no difficulty, laddie. I'm a puir mon, but I'd give ye fifty pounds

for the place as it stands. It's a bar-gain."

"It would be," said Sandy, without emotion.

"I'd make it sixty for the old bailie's sake."

"I'll not be ruining you," said Sandy generously.

Saunders heaved a sigh.

"Ye be the true son of your father," he said. There was a moment's contemplative silence, then he sighed again as one arousing himself reluctantly from a pleasant reverie. "Ah, weel, maybe you're right to stick to the old place, laddie. You'll settle down and take a bra' lassie to look after ye. There's Jeannie waving me to come into supper. You'll no drop in for a bit?"

The young man shook his head.

"There's a nine-pointer somewhere in the glen. I've promised the laird to stalk for him to-morrow, and I'll be having a look round before I turn——"

He was interrupted by a sudden crash of music from the far end of the street—the rattle of drums and a discordant blare of trumpets; and half a dozen of Kirk Humphries' rising generation took to their heels with warlike shrieks of delight that their forefathers would have envied. Saunders drew himself up.

"It's the play actors," he said, hoarse with indignation. "They've set their tent right in the market place, and it's there the devil'll sit and spin round the souls of our puir foolish laddies. I tell ye, Sandy, play actors are the children of the evil one. I ha'e seen them in London—brazen-faced hussies, with blue eyes and golden hair, and no more on than a pair of pink stockings——"

"I canna believe it," interrupted Sandy, crimson to the ears.

"You may weel say so—but it's the truth. I took no count of London, to which Sodom be white as snow, but I'll no stand by and see Kirk Humphries go to perdition. I and the meenister will have a word with the laird, and if we canna sweep the place free——" He snorted unutterable threats. "It's the English ha'e brought Satan amongst us," he went on, with redoubled fierce-

ness, as a scurrying urchin in a bedraggled kilt stumbled over his feet. "Me son Jamie heard tell that Sir John has ordered a foreign play actress—Donna Eleonora Dolamora, she's called—up to Glen Every, and that she's to play act to them—"

"In pink stockings?" queried Sandy, deeply distressed.

"Maybe. But she gets a hundred pounds a night, says Jamie."

It impressed them both, in spite of themselves. Sandy McGrab glanced cautiously down the street in the direction of the hubbub.

"I'm thinking she'll not be like that," he said.

"She'll be worse!" was the retort. "It's for the wickedness that they're paid. You'll no be yielding to temptation, laddie?"

McGrab shook his head.

"It's awful that such things be," he said very solemnly, and turned his eyes resolutely to the house opposite. "I'll be getting along. Good night."

"Good night. And if you care to change your mind some time, Sandy McGrab, I'd make it sixty-five for auld lang syne—"

But Sandy was already out of hearing at the back of the shop. There it was now quite dusk. Very cautiously, as if afraid of being caught red-handed in some felonious enterprise, he waited until Saunders' broad-shouldered figure had vanished from the square patch of daylight. Then he slipped his hand behind a bale of homespun and, drawing out a tattered-looking volume that lay hidden there, he thrust it into an inner pocket of his coat. Thereafter, with an air of grave detachment, he proceeded to shut up the shop for the night.

A quarter of an hour later, Jeannie Saunders, who had kept anxious watch at the window opposite, saw him stride up the street and around by the bridge that leads over the river to Glen Every. Jeannie Saunders drew a little sigh of relief. She had never been outside Kirk Humphries, but her woman's instinct mistrusted brazen hussies who danced

in pink stockings, and still more the strong-mindedness of the mankind that condemned them. And Sandy McGrab had not so much as glanced at the white tent pitched in the market place. That much she was sure of.

But the din with which the traveling show announced its advent into Kirk Humphries pursued Sandy McGrab far into the mountains. He climbed rapidly, leaving the beaten track and following the lengthening shadows toward the heights outlined against the pale emerald sky. Whether or not he was stalking was hard to say, but it seemed unlikely, for he looked neither to the right nor to the left until he had reached his destination.

There, underneath the great boulder that frowned over the glen, he came to a halt, and surveyed the prospect with anxious intentness. Nothing moved save the sunlight, flying like a beaten army to a last fastness on the distant hilltops. Not a stag—not so much as a rabbit—showed itself. Sandy McGrab sniffed the air luxuriously. There was a keenness in it that told of long, hard nights to come and the scent of the moldering leaves that shone red gold against the somber background of faded gorse and heather. A long way off something dead white glittered amidst the crimson clouds—the first finger streak of winter. A mighty sigh of relief heaved up Sandy McGrab's big shoulders. Then, very solemnly, he took out the shabby little volume.

"In such a night
Did Jessica—"

he began.

He went right through with it, at first reading with his back against the boulder, his feet crossed, his tam-o'-shanter rakishly planted over one ear; but finally the volume dropped from his hands, the tam-o'-shanter went after it to keep it company, and Sandy McGrab and Will Shakespeare made love to the sunset with a mingled passion and delicacy, flavored with the faintest Scotch accent, that would have moved a harder heart than that of sweet Jessica.

But by the time the shadows had

deepened from amethyst to purple, poor Jessica had been faithlessly deserted. To an attentive white-tailed rabbit, which squatted on its haunches at a safe distance, Sandy McGrab poured out his glowing narrative of Cleopatra's passage down the Nile, her meeting with great Antony, the detailed picture of her glories, and of the winds that sighed about her in amorous attendance. What the rabbit thought of it could not be said, but there was that in Sandy McGrab's rich-toned voice that assuredly must have compelled the late Andrew McGrab, minister at Kirk Humphries, to turn, not once, but many times, in his grave.

"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."

declared Sandy McGrab finally and triumphantly. And at that moment some one applauded.

Sandy McGrab started as if he had been shot. No conscience-stricken murderer could have gazed more guiltily about him. Whence had come the burst of approval? Certainly not from the rabbit, which had taken to instant and precipitous flight. Sandy gazed up. On the top of the boulder, half sitting, half kneeling, her face full of the golden sunlight, was his audience.

"Oh!" he said, with a deep breath.
She nodded at him.

"I've been listening," she said. "I couldn't help it. I've heard those lines from a good many people—some of the very greatest—but I've never heard them like that. It was wonderful! Who are you?"

He made no answer, still petrified with the awfulness of his discovery and the loveliness of his discoverer.

"You must be a 'pro,'" she asserted gravely.

Sandy McGrab pulled himself together.

"I'm not," he said. "I'm a Highlander."

She laughed.

"A Highland actor!" she said gayly. "Isn't that a possible combination?"

"Play actors are the children of the devil," he declared, and the spirit of

the late McGrab shone in his scornful eyes.

"All of them?" she asked.

"Yes," he said truculently.

"Thanks! I'm one. You're another."

"Oh!"

"Are you a child of the devil?"

"No!" very decidedly.

"Am I?"

He took courage to look up at her again. Verily, her hair glistened like gold, her eyes were blue, and her lips crimson. It was even as Saunders had said, and yet—

"I canna think it!" he broke out, deeply moved, and with a sudden lapse into his own tongue. "I canna think it. You are not as they be."

"Thank you again. I'm not like what?"

He pointed down to Kirk Humphries.

"Not like those," he said.

"Ah!" She was silent a moment. "You mean—the traveling players," she went on slowly. "You've seen them, I suppose?"

"No."

"That means you wouldn't go to see them—for fear of your immortal soul? Why not? What's the matter, with them?"

Sandy McGrab crimsoned.

"I canna tell you," he said coldly. "It's not for the ears of a woman."

He was thinking of the pink stockings dancing their way to perdition, and his brow darkened with defiance. The lady perched above him laughed to herself.

"I see. Too bad for words. And who, then, do you think I am?"

He looked up at her again—more boldly.

"The great play actress from abroad," he said. "The one that is to stay with Sir John Hodge over there, and play to his guests for a hundred pounds a night. I ken her name. Donna Eleonore: Dolamora, she's called."

"And because I am great and get a hundred pounds a night, my relationship with the devil is to be passed over, while those poor beings down there are to be cast into utter darkness?"

"No," he faltered, and then went on

firmly: "I'm thinking—if you're great, you'll love great things—as I do."

"Modest man! Because I appreciate the things you appreciate!"

"You're laughing!" he said sullenly.

"No, I'm not. It's very serious—a little tragic. You've not thought that greatness is often only success, and that failure can sometimes love great things."

He was silent, frowning over her words, and she rested her chin in the palm of her hand, and looked down at him meditatively.

"I wonder who you are," she said again.

It was scarcely a question, and somehow he did not accept the opportunity to tell her of the long-established firm of McGrab & Son. Her eyes were very blue, and might become a little mocking.

"I think I can guess," she went on. "Before you began making love to Jessica, I had been dreaming, picturing to myself the kind of man to whom all this wild, ragged land must belong. I saw his ancestors—strong, brave men, defending inch for inch their beloved glens and hills from the treacherous English horde. I heard the wail of the bagpipes, and the clash of the swords, and the din of battle. And then I saw you, and I knew you must be the son of those brave days and those brave men. I felt as if I were an alien—a trespasser—and that this land was yours."

He did not speak for an instant. He had taken a step forward, so that he stood, one foot advanced, on the very edge of the crag, his handsome, stubborn head thrown back, his shoulders squared, his hands clenched at his sides. A gust of wind caught his tartan shawl, and blew it back in a bold sweep against the rocks.

"My clan fought here—" he said jerkily.

"I felt sure. And now you are still defending the land from the invader—from me?"

"You are—welcome."

"Am I? I'm glad—if it's true. I do not wish to flatter you. I have always loved everything that belongs to the

Highlands. I've wanted to know and see and understand."

"You'll not see much up there," he said, with a sudden scorn. "You'll not learn much from him."

"From whom? Oh, from Sir John! I had forgotten. No. He's English. He can't hear the bagpipes or see the queer little fairy folk in the glens, can he?"

"Can you?" he asked quickly, a little breathlessly.

"I've been watching them all the evening," she said.

"You!" His eyes shone, his straight mouth relaxed. "I could show you—" he began impulsively, and faltered again.

"What?" She bent down to him. "Won't you show me things, lord of the glen? I've a few days of freedom before I go—up to Sir John. Won't you show me your castle up there on the crags—where you live, where your wild ancestors fought and died—won't you?"

She was pointing up to the McPhersons' last stand against their oncoming host of creditors—a low-built hunting box, rising up from the crest of a distant precipice—and he followed the indication of her finger with a suppressed gasp.

"I—" he began. Then he looked up at her. Her eyes were extraordinarily, wonderfully blue, and she was smiling. He squared himself defiantly. "I'll take you—to-morrow," he said.

"Thank you. It will be my great day—when I shall forget how great I am, and just be happy. You won't forget? Oh, no, I know a Scotsman keeps his word! And now it is getting late. I must go back."

She had risen suddenly, as if impelled by a sudden alarm, and he watched her graceful, sure-footed descent of the rocks with an awkward, shamefaced interest. It was a very small foot in a very neat shoe. There seemed nothing satanic about either, and yet Sandy McGrab's soul quivered within him as before the first onslaught of the evil one. She was almost beside

him when she turned and glanced down at him over her shoulder.

"Give me your hand to help me!" she said, almost petulantly.

He gave her his hand with an inspired gallantry that all the chieftains of Scotland might have envied. He held it for an unnecessary moment with a reckless disregard for every moral exhortation that had ever been uttered.

"Thank you—Antony," she said, and smiled.

He accompanied her to the little hotel where, as she informed him, she was resting for a night or two before entering on a strenuous social life up at Glen Every. She grew more voluble as they approached the town, Sandy McGrab more reticent. As they passed the doors of McGrab & Son's, clothiers, the very bales of homespun seemed to shriek at him. A minute later, she was bidding him good night and her hand was in his again.

"Till to-morrow, laird! Laird is the right word, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Sandy, and gulped down something that had once been a conscience.

"And I'm glad you're not going to see the play actors," she added. "I—I like you not to."

"I shan't," he affirmed bluntly, and added hypocritically: "Not now."

"Good night, then, laird."

"Good night."

Saunders was standing on his doorstep as Sandy McGrab returned. He was smoking thoughtfully, and staring at the shop opposite with an air of dispassionate criticism.

"Sandy McGrab!" he called across. "I've been thinking it over, mon. I'll make it seventy—"

Sandy McGrab went into his ancestral dwelling and slammed the door.

II.

THE LAIRD ENTERTAINS.

"Well, I shall make one more attempt at a reconciliation," said Sir John pompously and stretched out an unbooted foot in the direction of his valet. "The man's a fool, of course, going about

with his nose in the air because his grandfather was a smarter sheep stealer than the others; but it's my duty as landowner to do the neighborly, and I shall ask him up to meet Donna Eleonora next week. The car at ten-thirty sharp, James."

"Yes, Sir John."

On the other side of the glen, the last of the McPhersons was rallying his retainers round him preparatory to the day's sport. The retainers consisted of two ancient gillies, a daw-faced housekeeper, and a blind pony, and all four had belonged to the McPhersons from the day of their birth, a date too remote even for historical research.

"And if that red-faced, turned-milk son of an Englishman puts his nose in here, ye can shoot him!" said the laird, shouldering his gun. "Where the devil is that man, Sandy?"

Old Janie, the housekeeper, looked blander than usual and, no one seeming to know the renegade Sandy's whereabouts, the laird went off, cursing gloomily. The news that a foreign actress was to be entertained by the turned-milk son of an Englishman at Glen Every, which the laird persistently regarded as usurped property, added to Sandy's desertion, had heated his irascible temper to boiling point.

Fortunately, he had passed over the brow of the hill long before Sandy McGrab made his belated appearance. There was nothing about the latter to suggest deerstalking. Never, save for the gathering of the clans, had Sandy McGrab adorned himself so bravely. The kilt was brand-new, likewise the plaid, and the buckles on his shoes sparkled true silver in the sunlight. And beside him walked a lady. At the narrow stone bridge that crossed the ravine, they came to a halt.

"And so this is where you made your last great stand?" she asked gently, and looked up at him, standing broad and erect beside her.

He nodded.

"They came up here—along the track," he said, "hundreds of them. Donald McPherson knew the secret path, and reached the bridge with a

minute to spare. There were forty of his clan left, and they held the bridge for a day and a night. As each man fell, another took his place—then it was all over. But Donald McPherson was over the mountains and with the Stuarts. It was a grand fight."

"And the forty?"

"They died," he said.

Again she glanced at him wonderingly.

"You'd do that?" she asked.

"Die? Oh, yes!"

"Only—it would be the others that would die for you," she corrected quickly. "You are the chieftain."

There was a note of pride in her soft voice. He stemmed his fist against his thigh, and frowned proudly over the glen. Had one Douglas McGrab not held his post loyally at the bridge, perchance there would have been no more McPhersons to lead to glory; and if not a McPherson, why not a McGrab? It was a matter of the purest chance.

"Of course," said Sandy.

The narrative of the fight had brought the hot blood to his cheeks, and his heart was thumping against his ribs. At that moment, he could have held the bridge against a thousand for so long as she looked at him with that wondering admiration. Never, surely, had a woman such blue, sweet eyes!

"There is the house," he said, almost gruffly.

It was old Janie who opened the iron-studded door to them. Old Janie stared mightily as the unknown lady swept past her, and as her eyes met those of Sandy McGrab, her jaw dropped. He put his finger to his lips.

"Whist, Janie! Ye ken if the laird's awa'?"

"Aye, but——"

"The lady's fra Glen Every," he whispered back. "I'm the laird. Ye'll no tell on me, Janie?"

She looked at him. The old, dull eyes became exceedingly shrewd. One might almost have said that they laughed in whimsical self-mockery.

"You're a bra' laddie, and I'm a puir, foolish old woman," she said. "I'll no tell on ye till ye be found oot, Sandy."

He went past her. In the great dining hall his lady was waiting for him, standing like some lovely spirit of a modern age amidst the battered emblems of a rougher generation. She had taken a rusty-bladed dirk from the oak wall, and the jeweled hilt glittered in the sunlight.

"And your vassals, my lord?" she asked gayly.

"They're out after a stag," he said grandly. "And I'm staying for a bit in Kirk Humphries. They aren't expecting me."

"In Kirk Humphries?" she echoed, and it seemed as if a faint uneasiness had crept into her voice. "Where? Have you a—a place there, too?"

"It's a wee bit of a place—over the shop of McGrab, ye ken?"

In a flash of panic, he had dropped back into his own tongue, and the shadow passed from her face, and she laughed.

"Over a shop?" she exclaimed. "And you could live here? Oh, laird!"

"It's no such a bad shop," he returned proudly. "The McGrabs are honorable men."

"I ha'e no doot," she mimicked him. "With a funny name like that, they ought to be something worthy and respectable. McGrab! I can see the man! And what would he think of a bold, bad actress woman, and a bold, bad laird who can play act like Garrick and a Kean and an Irving all rolled into one? What would all Kirk Humphries think, I wonder?"

There was an oak staircase leading to a door near the ceiling, and impulsively she turned and ran to the little landing, and leaned over to him.

"Well, Romeo?" she laughed.

"And if Romeo were called McGrab?" he asked sullenly.

"Why, then——"

"What's in a name? That which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet."

Their eyes met. What happened then, what wild strain of ancestral blood caught fire in his veins cannot be told. But suddenly the grim old hall vanished, and they were in a flowered

garden where roses clamored up the trelliswork to the moon-lit balcony, and a kilted Romeo poured out the richness of his newly wakened passion in verse no less beautiful for the breath of Highland air that scented it. And a fair-haired Juliet, whose fashionable brogues peeped through the balustrade, answered with a poetic verse no less absolute because touched with a bewilderment such as the real Juliet, overtaken by a sudden, undreamed-of emotion, might well have experienced.

Only with the words:

"With love's light wings did I o'er perch these walls;
For stony limits cannot hold love out,
And what love can do that dares love at-
tempt,"

did the realities of the situation break in upon them. There was obviously no method of reaching the psuedo-balcony save by the staircase, which was dramatically unfitting, and for an instant they gazed blankly at each other, brought suddenly to earth and a trifle dazed by the transit. There was a sprig of faded heather in the belt of her dress, and she took it and threw it down to him. He caught it and bent his head over it, and when he looked up again the face of Sandy McGrab matched richly with his hair. But the tension was over.

"Laird," she began, "if you hadn't been a Scotsman, you'd have been a poet."

"There's more poetry in half a Scotsman than in ten Englishmen," he retorted, and was himself again.

"Well, if you hadn't been the great chieftain of a clan, you'd have been a great actor."

"If I were—plain McGrab, I could play Romeo?"

"If you were John Jones, you could play Romeo better than any man living."

"And to your Juliet?"

"Ah, if that were possible!"

"Why shouldn't anything be possible?"

Assuredly, Sandy, the son of Andrew, was making fast headway in the direction of perdition. He had one foot

on the stairway, and to look down at him was to be transported back a hundred years to a time when even the McGrabs had been capable of anything and a brave chieftain took what he wanted—from a sheep upward—at the point of the sword. The whilom Juliet caught her breath.

"Laird—" she said.

"I'd make it possible," he interrupted. "I—"

And then a motor horn tooted outside the window.

Very slowly, Romeo returned the ascending foot to its starting point. The robber chieftain vanished, and left no greater person than Sandy McGrab himself to face the situation. He faced it grimly and with stour self-possession.

"Maybe it's a guest," he said. "I was almost expecting some one. I'll go and see—"

"Oh, very well—only—"

He did not hear the end of the sentence. He was already outside the door and had closed it sharply behind him, setting his shoulders against its polished paneling. Malcolm McPherson's burly figure filled the passage.

"Sandy," he said, "you're a traitor, mon."

"I'm worse," said Sandy McGrab. "I'm the laird."

"What the devil—" McPherson began, and laughed sourly. "It's the whisky bottle you've been at."

"It's no whisky bottle." Sandy jerked his head at the door behind him. "There's a lady in there," he said.

"A lady? Muckle I care! There's that Englishman outside, and I canna shoot him. The weakness of the generation is in my blood. Go out, Sandy, mon, and tell him if he sets foot inside my door, I'll—"

"I canna do it," Sandy interrupted. "The lady is his guest."

"His guest? Who brought her here?"

"I did. It was for the laird she took me."

"And you let her believe that—you young scoundrel!"

Sandy McGrab sighed.

"I dinna ken how it was," he said.

"Almost I believed it myself." Then he looked the laird squarely in the eye. "Laird, I'm a scoundrel, but ye'll no make fools of us both to that red-faced, bull-necked Englishman? Ye'll no do it."

"I—"

At that crucial moment two things happened. Sir John Hodge ambled in at the open hall door, and the door of the banqueting room was sharply opened. The laird looked from one direction to another, then his eyes returned to Sandy McGrab's set, white face. For an instant they did battle together.

"Ye'll no do it!" said Sandy, between his teeth. "Ye'll no give him the laugh over me—"

The laird turned slowly.

"Sir John," he said, with a suavity that was the McPhersons' war signal, "you've come in the nick of time. A guest of yours has honored us with her presence here. We were just showing her the banqueting hall—"

Sir John came slowly forward, the uncertain smile in his square face fading to a look of bewilderment.

"Sir John Hodge," said Sandy McGrab desperately, "Donna Eleonora Dolamora."

Fortunately, the baronet did not look at him. He was staring at the lady, who held out her hand with a gracious condescension that suggested intimate acquaintanceship. The color in her cheeks deepened.

"You do not remember me, Sir John?" she said reproachfully. "Have I so much changed?"

"Madame—Donna—" He made a hopeless gesture. "You forget—I never had the pleasure of meeting you—I am horrified— There has been some mistake—I understood that I was to expect you—next week—"

"There is no mistake," she interrupted lightly. "I arrived in your village a few days in advance, for a little rest cure of silence and solitude. It happened that the laird and I became acquainted, and he was kind enough to forestall your hospitality. The mystery is no greater than that, Sir John."

She was looking smilingly at Sandy, while Sir John glared at the laird. A slow resentment was beginning to make way through his confusion.

"I am grateful to the laird, I am sure," he muttered.

The clouds on the great brow of the McPherson vanished as before a gust of wind. The signs of his enemy's discomfiture were as honey to his soul. In the direction of Sandy McGrab he winked solemnly.

"The honor is here with us," he said. "You'll stay and join us in our frugal meal?"

Sir John shook his head. He had come to be gracious, to bury the hatchet and to spread out his magnificence. In some subtle way he had been outdone, and he was very angry.

"My time is limited," he said stiffly. "I only passed on my way to Glen Every, to ask if it would not be possible for you to keep your side of the river in better order, laird—" He broke off. "But that is business, and we have a lady with us. Donna Eleonora, if I might take you back to Glen Every with me?"

"Next week, Sir John. And for today the laird has still much to show me."

"Till next week, then!"

He bowed over her hand after the manner he considered due to a foreigner; he nodded at the laird, he ignored Sandy. Throughout, Sandy had scarcely moved. Save for the lady's glance and McPherson's solemn wink, he had passed unnoticed. Now, as Sir John stalked out of the front door, McPherson turned to him with a slow smile.

"And now, laird," he said sweetly, "will ye no introduce your poor cousin to the lady before we go in to lunch?"

III.

UNMASKED.

Sandy McGrab trimmed his lamp with a hand that in the last few days had lost its steadiness. He took the shabby-coated book from its shelf, and,

opening it at random, sat down by the window and stared at the closely printed pages. There was a sprig of heather in a tiny vase standing immediately in front of him. He did not look at it, but presently he pushed it out of sight behind the lamp. For a few minutes, he fought its malign influence stoically, then he drew it out again from its hiding place and set it before him, folded his arms and gazed at it with hollow, miserable eyes.

"Sandy McGrab," he said, "ye're no Romeo and no Antony and no laird. Ye're a mean, sneaking, lying Lowlander, and ye maun tell her so."

He repeated the statement, not once, but many times, and then he took up pen and paper and began to write. On the other side of the road, the lights of the rival clothier's window burned brightly, and from time to time a woman's head outlined itself sharply against the cheerful background. Sandy McGrab took no heed. He wrote feverishly:

I'm no laird, just a mean, lying little shopkeeper, and I have to tell you.

Then, in the distance, the noisy brass band of the traveling show caught his attention. He sat back and listened with the sweat gathering on his forehead. "A mean, little shopkeeper!" he repeated dully.

"Sandy, mon!"

It was Saunders on the other side of the road. Jeannie Saunders, with a shawl over her head, hung on her father's arm, and her eyes shone as she looked up at the lighted window, though no one saw their shining.

"Aye!" said Sandy absently.

"Are you no coming to the show, laddie? It's no so bad, I've heard. Tonight it's for some charity, and the laird's to be there, and the minister, and the Englishman, though I ken he's no warrant for respectability. I've a ticket here. Ye'll no come?"

"No," said Sandy curtly. "I canna come."

Jeannie Saunders looked back reluctantly as she followed her father down the street. She caught just a glimpse of

a red curly head bowed low under the lamplight.

Sandy McGrab wrote for an hour, and then, when he had finished, methodically tore up all that he had written and started a second time.

"I'd almost forgotten again," he muttered. "I'm no laird—and she's a grand lady. I've got to remember."

Footsteps sounded on the quiet street. It was Saunders again—Saunders unusually moved from his phlegmatic serenity—with Jeannie, who hung her head as if beneath a burden of shame.

"Sandy!"

"Aye?"

"Ye were a wise laddie to bide awa'! It was awful! There was a brazen hussie with no more on her than a pair of pink stockings and a flimsy skirt and a string of beads. She sang. I dinna ken what she sang, for I put my fingers in my ears; but I saw the laird and the Englishman give each other a look of horror as if the devil himself had risen up amongst us, and they went out, and I've heard say there were high words between them, and that—the laird——"

Sandy McGrab slammed down the window. He wrote on:

I cannot tell you why I did it. It all seemed true to me—

He stopped again. Something had creaked outside his door; there was a blind, timid trying of the handle, and a faint knock. He strode impatiently across.

"If it's yourself, Saunders——" he shouted fiercely.

Then the door opened, and he stumbled back a step, his hand gripping the chair behind him.

He recognized her at once—in spite of the loose, disordered hair, the painted lips and eyes, the ugly, disguising cloak that she held about her. She threw back her head almost defiantly, but for all that she seemed to have shrunk together, to have lost height.

"Donna Eleonora!" he stammered stupidly.

"Don't mock me, laird," she burst out, "for pity's sake!"

He saw then that there were tears

carving their channels down the powdered cheeks, but he could not speak or move, and she came in, closing the door behind her.

"I had to come," she said. "I know it's mad and foolish—anything you like—but I had to. When I saw Sir John and your cousin, I realized what I had done—what you would think and suffer—and I had to make you understand—to explain. There's not many men I could explain to—but you are different. Those who understand goodness and greatness understand folly and meanness and misery—"

"Donna Eleonora!" he repeated.

She lifted her eyes to his face. She saw then that he was looking at her feet—at two small, pink feet. Her hands dropped limply, and the coat fell apart. Sandy McGrab turned away with a smothered groan.

"You—you weren't there?" she stammered.

"No, I wasn't there."

He dropped down by the table with his face buried in his hands, and suddenly she laughed shrilly, harshly.

"There's irony in that, isn't there? I might have gone to-morrow, and you would never have known—never have guessed. I should just have been a mystery. You would have thought of me as Juliet—as Jessica—as Cleopatra—you would have seen me as I was with you up on the moors—or Juliet's balcony—and now you've seen me—like this—a child of the devil, as you'd say—a wandering outcast, a failure! I've flung the truth at you—all for nothing—gratis. It would be screamingly funny, only—"

She stopped short. Her dry, miserable eyes had caught sight of the sprig of heather, and passed on to the bowed head, the heaving shoulders. And suddenly she was beside him, her hands clasped over his.

"Laird," she said, "don't—don't! It's hurting me. If I'd done it for a joke, it would have been cruel, but it wasn't that. You took me so for granted—and I've been buffeted and knocked about so badly! It was good to have a man look at me as you did—so fairly and hon-

estly. You never saw the cheap, tawdry clothes. You never criticized the outside. You saw the best, and I couldn't—couldn't make you see the worst." She was breathing brokenly, but the clenched hand under hers had relaxed, and she went on with a little sob: "Laird, it isn't the shoes or the clothes that make the woman—and—and it wasn't a song you'd have minded. It was just—'Robin Adair'—"

He lifted his head, and instinctively she drew the old cloak about the scanty, chiffon dress. Then, with a movement that was not defiant, but only wearily resigned, she let it drop again, and stood before him, a figure half beautiful, half painfully pathetic.

"And it might have been so different!" she went on huskily. "In a year or two, I might have come back what you thought me—what perhaps is, after all, the truth. Look!"

She had laid a crumpled telegram on the table before him, and he picked it up and stared at it dully.

"I don't understand—"

"It's from Braithwaite—the manager of The King's. He's producing 'Romeo and Juliet' to-morrow night, and his star has fallen ill and I could have had the part. It was my chance—what he'd promised me. And now it's too late!"

"Why?" he demanded.

"The telegram went astray. The last rehearsal is to-morrow morning. If I'm not there, I've lost it, and the Edinburgh express is gone. You see—I've missed everything all round."

He got up heavily, and for an instant kept his head averted. Then he looked at her full.

"It's Juliet for all that," he said. He took up his tam-o'-shanter from the table, and threw a cloak over his shoulders. "You'll wait here. Don't answer if any one knocks. I'll put the light out. You're not afraid?"

"There's nothing left to be afraid of, is there?"

He made no answer. He went down the narrow stairs, through the deserted shop, and across the street to the rival clothier.

"I'll take the seventy," he said to Saunders, who opened the door. "But I want it now."

"Ye can have it, laddie."

He was gone an hour. When he came back, she was still sitting where he had left her, an old plaid of his about her shoulders, her chin resting in her hand. He could just see the delicate profile, clean cut against the half light from the street below, and her free hand playing idly with the letter that he had written her. He remembered it, and came across and tore it in half. No one need know now. He was going to be the laird—the great man—to her to the end.

"It's all right," he said quietly. "There's a special train leaving Inverness in an hour. I've a cart waiting to take you in. You'll have time to—to change—and to-morrow morning you'll be in London." Still she did not speak, and suddenly he took a step toward her. "You're crying," he said. "Why do you cry?"

She turned her head. In the half darkness he saw that she was quivering with a stifled passion.

"I can't play Juliet again—not now. Don't you understand? I was so proud and happy. The way you looked at me—your respect—your admiration—I was Juliet, I was your equal—and now—you're good and generous—but I'm in the dust—"

For an instant he did battle with himself. Then he was across the room and on his knees beside her.

"It's no true. It's I who am in the dust. I'm no laird, no great man. I'm

just a poor, lying, cheating fool—a shopkeeper—a nobody! Only I didn't mean to cheat. It was all true to me. I was really Antony and Romeo and the laird—"

He bowed his burning face on her hands, and there was a little silence. Her voice came at last scarcely above a breath.

"You're just—just—"

"Sandy McGrab."

She freed one hand, and laid it on his shoulder. She laughed a little, and the laugh ended in a sob.

"Oh, Sandy McGrab, how glad I am! Play actors, both of us—children living their dreams! And now the curtain's gone down and the play's over. Only I don't need to be ashamed. I can look you in the eyes, Sandy McGrab, and you will look at me—" She stopped, and lifted his face gently to hers. "It was all true, wasn't it? Just for a little hour we rose above our circumstances and were ourselves. And you were Romeo and the laird, and I was Juliet and a great actress. And one day perhaps—"

"We shall be ourselves again."

She laughed a little, and it was a laugh quivering with triumph.

"To-morrow night I shall be Juliet!"

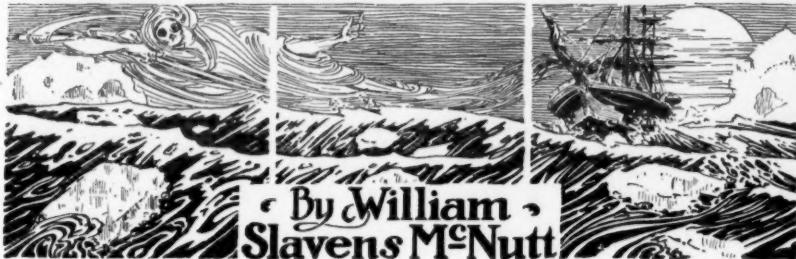
"And one night I shall be your Romeo," he said, between his teeth.

She bent and kissed him on the forehead.

But it was only an hour later, when Sandy McGrab's special express had steamed out of Inverness, that he realized that he did not even know her name.



THE RIGHT THING



By William
Slavens McCullough

ADREARY, ice-cluttered bay, notched in the western shore of treeless, low-lying Herschel Island, fifteen miles off the arctic mainland. On the curve of the low beach, the barnlike structure built by the — — Whaling Company, and furnished with pool and game tables as a preventive against madness for its exiled crews through the long, dark winters, a cluster of native huts, and the strong dugouts of the fleet bulked against the slope of the low headland. In the harbor eight whaling vessels riding at anchor, and away to the north—the ice; ice in floes, and cakes, and fields; ice checkered with narrow lanes of open water that splashed and heaved, gray-black, under a gray-black sky of scudding cloud. And over all the intangible, grim, indescribably weird and terrible threat of the oncoming arctic winter. That was the arctic whaling fleet in winter quarters on September 1st, 19—.

The two-masted gasoline auxiliary schooner *Sea Horse*, and the three-masted steam bark, *Aurora*, lay together and somewhat apart from the remainder of the fleet. They had been the last in from the whaling grounds to the westward by far Bailey Island. They had arrived together only the morning before, while the remainder of the fleet had been in harbor for a week, taking in sail, wooding ship, and preparing for the mighty grip of the cold that was fast closing on them. The ice was closing early that year. On the morning of

the first there had been fringes of ice on the hulls about the water lines of all the vessels, and a glassy film over many of the leads before the winds sprang up and shifted the floes.

Young Marshall, the master of the *Sea Horse*, gnarled, leather-faced, chocky old Captain Graves, of the *Aurora*, and another man in furs, baggy reindeer trousers, and mukluks, stood together on the poop deck of the *Aurora*.

The other man was a doctor. The columns of the daily papers were thoroughly besprinkled with his name a few years ago, and the name was coupled in shame with that of the wife of another man. He was a brilliant doctor, and his name may also be found at the head of learned articles in medical journals published before his disappearance from the world. On shore lived his half-breed wife, the daughter of a Swede whaler and a full-blood Eskimo woman. Two quarter-breed children called him father. The great maw of the arctic had never swallowed a more romantic morsel than Doctor Femmer.

He shrugged his skin-clad shoulders at a question of the old captain's.

"She might live till October, November—possibly until January," he said. "Not longer. I know your position. I realize that you can't get out now, with the ice in this shape, but the impossible is sometimes done, and her life depends on your doing it. Her lungs will not stand it. In a warm climate— She'd recover there very probably. She would

have an excellent chance. But here—It's death, captain, and the length of time I've given her is probably longer than she'll live."

The old man stood facing the North, the pitiless, implacable, terrible North that he had fought for so many years. He had dashed into the icy jaws of the arctic time and time again, as they had yawned briefly to the warm breath of the short summer, to snatch the wealth of bone and oil from the bowhead whales, and had squirmed his venturesome vessels clear time and again—the last of the fleet to run—just before the great jaws snapped with the brittle cold of the long winter, grinding to splinters the stoutest of any luckless vessels caught in their deadly closing. He faced the North that he loved and hated, and faced it for the first time with the pallor of fear in his weather-toughened cheeks, and the weight of despair bowing his broad, brave shoulders.

He lifted both clenched hands slowly above his head, and shook them at the desolation of cloud, sea, and ice, and a sob wrenched itself from his brave, old heart with an effort that shook the squat, sturdy body like a death chill. It brought young Marshall to his side with a murmur of sympathy and a comforting hand.

The old man lowered his arms and looked from the younger captain to the sometime doctor.

"She's—all—I've—got." He wrenched the words out with the seeming of a man straining at a terrible weight. "Her mother died when—she—was—three. Every voyage—I've watched her grow from—I can't—I—"

The stubborn throat locked on the words, and the old sea fighter turned to stare into the North again, silent, suffering in every fiber of him. His eighteen-year-old daughter lay in her cabin, dying. She had been slowly weakening throughout the summer on the whaling grounds, and Doctor Femmer had used the dread word "consumption" after his examination of her.

"She would probably recover in a warm climate."

The doctor's words rang in the old man's ears, and hammered madness into his brain. The ice was closing already, and freedom lay no nearer than Tangent Point, five hundred miles to the westward. It might be farther away. It was certainly no nearer.

Five hundred miles through the closing ice, hunting open lanes, nothing but the shift of the wind to determine whether the ship was to keep on or be ground to splinters between the floes, and hard ice to buck, no matter how good the luck! And hard ice the *Aurora* could not buck. She was bluff-bowed, a medium clipper, and she could never open up a lead frozen across with a good layer of hard, young ice. One frozen lead would stop her, and frozen leads she would find.

"I'll be going ashore, cap," the doctor cut in on the old man's thoughts. "If there's anything I can do—but there isn't. I tell you straight. I know you haven't a chance to get out with this old, snub-nosed tub, and not one chance in a thousand even if she had a razor bow on her; but— Maybe there are still miracles. You can sail, and hope for one if you want to. She dies here."

The doctor nodded to Marshall, and slipped overside into his small boat, where an Eskimo awaited him.

"I'll—step in and see Ernie if you don't mind, sir," young Marshall suggested to the old man, when the doctor had left.

Graves nodded absently, and Marshall stepped down the companionway and knocked on the girl's door.

She was propped up in her bed when he entered, a gray-eyed slip of a thing, with a mass of disheveled golden hair, a rich, warm background on the white pillow for her pale, delicately molded face.

"He told daddy, didn't he?" she demanded anxiously. "I tried to make him promise not to. It's so useless. There is no chance for daddy to get me out now, and it would be so much kinder to let him hope until—it's over. He shouldn't have told him. Poor dad! Ah, poor daddy!"

"Ah, Femmer's crazy," Marshall de-

clared huskily. "You don't want to believe what he said. Why, he——"

"Don't." The girl shook her head, smiling slightly. "I know. Let's don't pretend, Harry. It will come."

"Don't you—care?" the young fellow whispered.

The girl's face grew pensive, and she nodded slightly, toying with the leaves of a book in her lap.

"Yes, I don't want to—to leave," she said slowly. "But I'm not afraid. Not at all. It's only daddy. If it wasn't for him——"

The young fellow laid a huge, browned, shaking hand over the white, small one on the coverlet.

"Is it only daddy?" he probed hoarsely. "Is it—— I love you. I didn't mean—— Oh, I didn't mean to tell you now, but I do! I love you so, my sweetheart! My dear, brave, little sweetheart woman! Oh, call your father and have me kicked out. I didn't mean to say it, but I couldn't help it. You know it now, anyway. I love you so, I could—— Oh, I could—— I love you!"

The girl looked at him, startled for a moment. The blood drained from her delicate oval cheeks, and then flooded back, her eyes misted, and with a little happy cry, she dropped her face into the young fellow's strong, brown palm.

"This—makes it—harder in one way," she whispered after a little, lifting her head from his breast to look up into his wet eyes. "But I'm glad I know. Oh, so glad! I love you so, boy! My boy!"

The young fellow shrank as if he had been struck, and rose unsteadily.

"I want to be alone," he said. "I'll be back."

He stooped and kissed the thirsty, upturned face fiercely, and strode out of the cabin.

Graves looked around as he came on deck.

"If she had only sharp bows," he muttered, "I'd—— I'll go anyhow, of course, but I'll never get out, boy. Some of the leads out there are frozen over this morning. If she only had sharp bows—— Going?"

"Yes," Marshall answered him sharply, and swung overside into his boat. He studied the *Sea Horse* with troubled eyes as the sailor rowed him toward her.

She was his first command, and he was proud of her as a mother is proud of her first-born. He was the youngest skipper who had ever taken a whaler into the North—only twenty-seven—but he had had five years in the arctic as mate aboard the *Aurora* under Captain Graves, than whom a better skipper in the arctic waters never walked a deck. It was owing to this as much as to his personal good record that old man Simpson, of the Simpson Whaling and Navigation Company, of San Francisco, had given him the berth on the *Sea Horse*.

"They're laughin' at me along the river front for givin' her to one so young, lad," the old man had told him the day the *Sea Horse* sailed. "But I'mbettin' you'll do the right thing. If I lose, I've picked wrong. But I don't think I'll lose, for I never read a man wrong yet."

The *Sea Horse* had taken mail in to the fleet at Bailey Island, and then gone after bone. She was a "head snatcher." That is, she took only the heads from the bowheads, took out the bone, and let the rest go. She carried no steam try vat for taking out the oil, as did the *Aurora*, and no tanks for oil. Her thirty men and four boats had done great service since she had reached Bailey Island on the third day of August. In her hold were fifteen thousand pounds of bone from seven great whales, bone worth five dollars a pound in the tackles—seventy-five thousand dollars for the trip; and she was provisioned for the winter, and for part of another summer's whaling.

It was a good record. Marshall felt that he had justified old man Simpson's faith in him; but his eyes, riveted on the *Sea Horse*'s bow as he was rowed toward her, were filled with a great agony and indecision. The *Sea Horse* had a full-clipper bow sheathed with an iron ice bucket. And the bow was sharp!

He went aboard and threw himself on

his berth in the cabin, the fingers of his outspread hands digging into the mattress, and fought his fight. The bow of the *Sea Horse* was sharp!

A half hour later the clanging of the steam winch on the *Aurora*, and the rasping roar of her anchor chain as the hook was drawn in, roused him. He went on deck and looked across at her.

The old man stood on the poop—his hands clasped behind him, his knees bent like a fighter's crouching for a spring, his chin thrust far forward—ripping out short orders. The *Aurora* was starting on her hopeless dash for freedom. A convict sprinting across an open field under the guns of a hundred guards not forty yards distant would have had more chance. Marshall looked at the bluff bows of the *Aurora*, reviewed his months of pride in his own command, and heard again Simpson's expressions of faith in him, all in the space of a split instant. Then, in a voice that came from his lips with no conscious volition of his own, he roared out:

"All hands on deck to get under way. Heave away there, Mr. Carmack. Don't stand there gasping at me, or I'll open your head and let some brains in. Cat and fish your anchor when it's up. Lively there, men, lively!"

The dazed mate repeated the order, and, as the bewildered men tumbled out, the donkeyman threw on the steam, and the pawls clanked on the windlass as the anchor chain rasped in.

Marshall picked up the megaphone and stepped to the starboard rail.

"I'll take the lead," he bellowed across the water to the old captain on the *Aurora*.

Graves leaned over the rail and opened his mouth to answer, but no words came; then he suddenly sat down on the wheel box and laid his gray, old head on his arms. The second mate, who was on the poop at the time, told the story that was repeated on the Frisco water front for years. The story was that old Captain Graves wept like a hurt child.

As the anchor came up on the *Sea Horse* the mate sang out. "All away,

sir," and Marshall rang two bells "Hard astarboard, my man," he sang out to the man at the wheel. The *Sea Horse*'s stern slewed to port as the screw thrashed, and her bow headed for the mouth of the harbor.

Two more bells stopped her, and then sent her ahead slowly, while the man at the wheel threw her hard aport.

Marshall caught up the megaphone and sprang up the main rigging to the crow's nest, to con the ship out of the harbor. Squatted back of the sloping windbreakers, he searched the desolate waste of ice and water with the long glass, looking for an open lead to the westward, as the *Sea Horse* chugged slowly out of the harbor mouth, followed by the heavier *Aurora*. Twisting to port, to starboard, slowing down to avert a head-on crash against a mighty berg or a telescoped floe, darting ahead to take advantage of an opened lane, the two vessels fought their way to sea. From the crow's nest, Marshall could make out open water ten miles away to the westward. The pack was drifting east, and under the urge of a southwest wind was closing fast. It seemed an impenetrable barrier. Short leads, which closed as he looked, showed ahead to starboard and port; leads that ended in bulwarks of high-piled, close-packed, groaning ice.

"Make to the south'ard and I'll hunt north," Marshall bellowed back to old Graves in the crow's nest of the *Aurora*. "She's a good ten miles through to open water, and packing fast. If you sight a likely lead, hoist a flag at the mainmast head, and I'll do the same."

The *Aurora* swung off to port, and headed south through the scattered floes along an edge of the pack, while the *Sea Horse* drew away to the north.

It was seven o'clock in the evening of the first of September when the two vessels broke ground and conned out of the harbor. Through the short twilight, on into the full day of the second, while the dim, far sun slid around the horizon, and twilight approached once more, for twenty-six hours the two vessels worked back and forth along the great pack; and when Marshall, on the

Sea Horse, at last sighted a promising lead, the vessel was less than a mile to the westward of the mouth of the harbor.

He hoisted the flag at the maintop-mast head, and at ten o'clock that evening the *Aurora* had worked north to within hailing distance.

The *Sea Horse* slammed into the lead first. The lane of water was not over thirty yards wide at best, and choked with the scattered ice, but it was a lead, a slender fissure of weakness in the great pack; and the *Sea Horse* entered it, careening from the shock as she sheered off from great, loose bergs in her path. Crashing head on into broken field ice that cluttered the lead, the little vessel shattered her way to the westward through the slender thread of weakness in the frigid prison wall, while the *Aurora* banged and ground along astern.

Neither Marshall nor Graves had left their posts since the start. They were three hours making the ten miles through the lead, and, when the *Sea Horse* shot free of the pack and into open water, Marshall had been in the crow's nest for twenty-nine hours without relief. As the two vessels drew clear, he waved to the old captain in the crow's nest of the *Aurora*, and climbed stiffly down the rigging.

"Keep her west by nor' half nor', Mr. Carmack," he mumbled to his mate, and staggered into his cabin, to fall asleep in his berth, fully dressed.

It was high noon when Marshall awoke and went on deck. It was clear and cold, only a few degrees above zero. A mile astern was the *Aurora*. Away to the north on the starboard, the ice blink from the main pack winked and glittered on the horizon in the rays of the low-hung sun. Fifteen miles to the southward on the port side, another hazy, white line shone—the blink from the ground ice on the mainland. Ahead, astern, to port and starboard, only open water was visible from the deck. The vessels were fleeing westward through a thirty-mile-wide lane that a shift of the wind might close in twenty-four hours, grinding both ships powder fine between

the main pack and the ground ice. Once past Tangent Point, they might feel safe; but Tangent Point lay yet four hundred and ten miles to the westward. The *Sea Horse* was capable of ten knots, but the *Aurora* could do no more than seven. Tangent was yet better than two days distant.

"A risky thing, sir," the mate declared respectfully. "She'll close most any time, now. A little shift in the wind—We'd best crowd her, and make all we can. If we run into a floe that's swung around from the main pack and grounded, it may take a full day's buckin' to get through, and the *Aurora*'d catch up by that time."

"And a floe might swing in behind us and cut us off," Marshall returned. "Keep her as she is. The *Aurora*'ll go out with us, or we'll all go to hell with her. Slow her down a couple o' knots and let her come alongside."

He climbed up into the crow's nest and swept the horizon with his long glass, while the *Aurora* drew slowly up.

Away ahead, the line of the main pack swung far in toward shore, leaving an open lane of only about four miles. Ahead of that, what?

The *Aurora* drew alongside, and Captain Graves hailed Marshall from the crow's nest of the larger vessel.

"Maybe you'd best run for it, son," the old man bellowed across the water. "A couple o' hours difference may tell the story, an' I don't want to see you lose your first vessel, boy."

"I'll drag along," Marshall yelled back. "We'll make it, cap. Crowd her all you can, and we'll get out."

Late in the afternoon the two ships ran through the narrow lane where a point from the main pack reached out to within three miles of the ground ice. An hour's wind from the north would close it.

Carmack, the mate, shook his head over the proposition.

"She's close, and they's likely other places as narrow," he said to Marshall. "If a long floe gets one end fast in the main pack, an' the other swings free—you know what it will mean in a strip as narrow as this. One end o' that

doe'll ground, and late in the year as it is, she'd never come loose before the main pack come down for good. Beggin' your pardon, sir, I'm tellin' you that it ain't a good thing for a young man to lose his first command. If you would—"

"We stay by the *Aurora*," Marshall snapped back at him. "I'll hear no more of that talk."

"Yes, sir," said the mate respectfully, and slid off into the waist.

He turned after a few steps and looked back at the young captain.

"I'd like to have you know, sir," he said hesitantly, "that I ain't afraid for myself. No, sir, I'm stickin' with you gladly. Bein' your first command, I didn't want to see you lose the *Sea Horse*. I—I'm sixty-three years, and I never was master of but one vessel. I was younger than you when—when I had her, sir, and I piled her up on Atacamas Shoals on the coast of Ecuador. You see, I know what it means to lose your first one. You're done for life, sir."

Marshall nodded shortly.

"Thank you, Mr. Carmack," he said huskily. "I know what you mean. I know it without your tellin'. We'll stick to the *Aurora*."

"Yes, sir," Carmack returned, and went on forward.

As the following day waned, the tension grew among the crews of both vessels. They were approaching Tangent Point, and beyond lay probable safety. The way was narrow. On the north, the main pack shone threatening, a dull, white waste not four miles off to starboard. Three miles away to port, the high-piled ground ice and the low arctic shore menaced.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the boatheader in the crow's nest shouted down: "Ice ahead! Ice ahead! We're into it, — — it! Here she is!"

Marshall sprang into the rigging, raced aloft, and snatched the glass from the boatheader's grasp. Dead ahead a white-blue strip showed clear. It ran, narrow, but unbroken, from the main pack, ten miles offshore to the ground ice.

"It's a long, narrow floe that's swung around from the main pack, and got one end grounded," the boatheader chattered, as Marshall looked. "An' damn her, she's grounded on the sandspit that runs out from Tangent Point! That's the Point there, sure's you're born. We're loose beyond that, an' there she is, dead ahead of us."

"We'll buck through," Marshall answered. "She's narrow."

"Narrow she is, and hard as chilled steel," the boatheader returned. "Get the color o' that ice through the glass? Blue, captain; blue-white. That's hard ice, an' she's fast in the main pack an' fast ashore. We're caught."

Marshall dropped the glass, caught the boatheader by the throat, and clouted him fair between the eyes.

"We're goin' through," he snarled at him. "Do you hear me? Goin' through. Let me hear you croakin' again about bein' caught, an' I'll hammer you small. We're goin' through."

He loosed the dazed boatheader, and, with a shaking hand, picked up the glass again. The ice was blue-white. It stretched, a narrow, blue-white sentence of death and destruction, from the great pack on the north to the ground ice on the sandspit of the point beyond which lay safety, and life, and health for the girl in the cabin of the *Aurora*, banging along astern. This was what the *Sea Horse* had come for. Here was where her full-clipper, steel-shod bow came into play. A half mile off the narrow floe, Marshall clambered down the rigging and rang the *Sea Horse* to stop.

"She ain't over sixty feet across in spots, but she looks bad," Graves hailed from the poop. "What do you think?"

"Stand by," Marshall called back. "I'm goin' to cut through. She's all hard ice, an' there ain't a weak spot in her. I've searched her with the glass from the main pack to the ground ice, and there ain't a weak spot anywhere. I'm goin' into her dead ahead. I'm goin' through."

He called down to the second mate on the bridge: "Full ahead there, Mr. Danton," and the little *Sea Horse* leaped, as the officer rang one bell and a

jingle. Square for the barrier the little steamer raced, while every man aboard braced for the shock. The glinting, blue edge was one hundred yards away, then fifty, then twenty-five. Marshall instinctively shut his eyes, as he wrapped his legs and arms about the mast, and clung. And then she struck. The masts swayed, bent, and shivered, as the iron ice bucker on the sharp prow crashed and bit. The ship shook in every fiber of her, like a sick thing mortally chilled, as the bow bit and crunched. Then she was at a standstill, though still she quivered with the agony of that fearful impact.

Marshall opened his eyes and looked down on deck. Not a man had moved. Flat on deck, clinging to ringbolts, clutching belaying pins along the rail and the lanyards of the main and fore-rigging, the men hung.

Carmack was the first to speak. He loosened his hold on the lanyards of the forerigging and peered overside.

"A good ten feet," he shouted to Marshall. "A good ten feet, captain. We'll make it, by——! She went in a good ten feet."

"Full astern," Marshall bellowed down to the second mate on the bridge.

The screw churned, the ship quivered again, but did not move. She was wedged, and held tight.

"We're stuck, captain," Carmack called up. "Best shut her off and let the *Aurora* yank us out."

"Shut her off," Marshall called down, and the second mate rang her to stop.

"I'm fast, captain," he bellowed through the megaphone to Graves. "Back in to take a line, and haul me loose."

"Clear away that starboard quarter boat an' stand by to take a line to the *Aurora*," he shouted, as the larger vessel swung about and backed in, stern on.

The crew cleared away the starboard quarter boat, hauled a two-inch line, attached to a steel hammer, to the *Aurora*, and heaved it aboard. The crew on the *Aurora* pulled in the hawser and made it fast around the mizzenmast.

"All ready there," Graves sang out

from the crow's nest. "Put her full speed astern and hang on. We'll rip you out o' that or tear you in two pieces."

"Full astern," Marshall shouted down to the second mate on the bridge.

"Full ahead," old Graves' voice rang out from the crow's nest of the *Aurora*. The two screws churned together. As the *Aurora* drew away, the slack hawser rose dripping from the water, straight and taut. The *Aurora* bucked and quivered from the shock, halted trembling for a moment, while her screw thrashed the sea into a whirl of foam, and then shot ahead, while the freed *Sea Horse* raced after her.

"Are you hurt, boy?" Graves hailed, as the crew loosed the hawser.

"I don't know, an' I don't give a damn!" Marshall shouted back. "I'm goin' through. Got to chisel her out little at a time. We can't bust that ice. She's hard as a rock cliff. On deck there! Full ahead. Give it to her. Run her into it! Run her! We're goin' through, boys. Careful there at the wheel, an' don't give her a spoke to starboard or port till I give it to you! Here we go. Give it to her!"

Marshall danced in the crow's nest, waving his clenched fist, and shouting like a wild man, as the *Sea Horse* leaped ahead for the ice barrier again.

Like a spectator at a race shouting at his favorite horse, he pleaded with his vessel as with a sensate thing, as she raced forward.

"Take her now, old girl; smash into her! Into it, damn you, into it! Go through, old girl, right into it! Now you're going. Go, damn you, go! Starboard, starboard, starboard, my man! Careful, careful there! Steady! Steady as she is. Port! Port, there! A little more. Steady as she is! Starboard a bit! Starboard! Hold her! Steady! Port! Port a bit more. Just a spoke there. Hold her! Now she goes. Steady as she is. Hang on there at steady. Steady as she is! Ring her off. Now! Now! Now!"

The second mate rang her off, and as the bells sounded, she hit. Hit not three feet from the left edge of the entering

wedge made in the first buck. The iron ice bucker on the sharp bow bit deep, as the stanch little vessel quivered, and the masts bent from the shock.

"Into her! Give her hell! Into her!" Marshall shrieked, clinging to the swaying masts with his arms and legs. "Go into her, girl, go!"

And go she did. Shaking and straining, the stanch little vessel plowed on, the clang of her iron bucker banging into the hard ice mixed with the dull grind and crunch of the wooden sides scraping through after. As the vessel came to a stop, a strip of ice ten feet long and three feet wide bobbed and floated away on the starboard quarter. She had chiseled that much free of the great mass as a carpenter chisels a tiny chip from a huge timber.

"That's workin', old girl, that's rammin' her!" Marshall fairly screamed, patting the still shivering mast as if caressing a loved being. "That's workin', old girl, — you! Take her astern down there. We're goin' through, boys! We're goin' through!"

The crew on the *Aurora* had caught the spirit of Marshall's determination, and a great cheer went up from the men crouched, tense, on her fo'c'sle head and clinging in the shrouds, as the *Sea Horse* backed out.

Marshall did not hear. He was deaf to everything. He crouched in the crow's nest, petting the mast, muttering to the ship, himself almost a part of her. He urged her with his body, straining in every muscle as his vessel struck and strained; feeling in every nerve and tendon of him the shock and agony with which the ship quivered as her powerful screw slammed her to her work again and again like a great fist of wood and steel battering at a deadly enemy. He did not hear the clear, high voice of the girl which rang above the shouts of the *Aurora's* crew, frantically urging on her lover. He heard only the smash and grind of iron and wood on ice, the groaning and creaking of his ship as she battled for her freedom, the cry of crushed timbers and strained belts; felt only the agony of the quivering thing of metal and wood that he

commanded, as his will drove her to her fearful work.

On the bridge of the *Aurora*, old man Graves stood crouching, tense, muttering unintelligible encouragement as the *Sea Horse* slammed in and backed away to slam in again. His daughter knelt beside him, watching the fight, white-faced, wringing her hands, swaying from side to side in strained sympathy with the battle of man and ship against the prison wall of ice, calling her word to her lover at intervals in a clear, high voice, that sounded above the hoarse yells of the crew like the vibrant strain of a violin over the roll of drums and the brazen note of horns.

Bit by bit, the *Sea Horse* chiseled out an opening full thirty feet wide and forty deep. She was strained and making water fast, but with not more than twenty-five feet to go. Marshall headed her straight in, in the hope of breaking through the buck. She went in not over six feet, and wedged at the first time; and when the *Aurora* yanked her free, her battered iron ice bucker wrenched loose and sank.

"Got to make it with the wood," Marshall shouted. "She'll do it. God bless her! She'll do it! We'll chisel her out with the stem."

"Shall I try bustin' through?" Graves hailed.

"She's solid clean through," Marshall called back. "You couldn't make a dent with that old snub-nosed tub. Astern down there, and we'll go again."

She went again, and yet again, and the oak stem wore clean to the wood ends as she chiseled away a good eight feet deeper.

"She won't stand another," the mate yelled up to Marshall in the crow's nest as the ship backed out. "She's wore clean down to her wood ends, captain."

"We're goin' through," Marshall shouted back. "She's deadwooded for'ard, an' she'll make it. Once more now, old girl! Steady! You'll do it. Full ahead down there. Give it to her! Give it to her!"

Again she went in, and yet again, and her wood ends split, and the deadwood wedged in the bow spat back into the

hold from the shock, and the water roared in. There was a good eight feet yet to break. Only eight feet of the ice between her and freedom!

"Now we go," Marshall shouted. "We'll bust her clean this trip. Full speed! We're goin' through!"

The *Sea Horse* shot ahead again on her last desperate buck. Her shattered wood ends crashed into the last barrier of the hard ice with a sickening crunch. The vessel almost halted, and Marshall cried aloud with sympathetic pain as the smash of the splintering bow reached his ears; and then, suddenly, the ice cracked ahead with a sharp report, the stricken *Sea Horse* leaped with a last effort like the death convulsion of a dying man, and with a great grinding and roar of breaking ice, shot clean into the clear water beyond the barrier, shot free, a victor in the fight—and doomed; for her bow was splintered wide open with the shock of the last buck.

"She's gone, captain," Carmack shouted up, as she lurched loose and sped ahead. "She's done for."

"Lower away the boats," Marshall answered him, in a dull, weary voice. "Get out your dunnage if you've got any to take, any of you. Lively there. She's going fast."

He stood straight in the crow's nest, staring ahead with unseeing eyes, while the men lowered away, and piled into the boats, and the *Aurora* steamed through the aperture in the ice strip, and drew alongside.

"Lively there," Graves called out. "She's going fast."

Marshall looked down at him wearily, shook his head, and, with a sudden shudder, sank to his knees in the crow's nest, and buried his head in his arms. The *Sea Horse* was his first command, and he had lost her. All the elation of his victory was drowned in the realization of his calamity. She was his first command, and he had lost her. He could feel the sickening lurches to lee and windward as the stout little death-struck craft settled by the head; and when the men from the *Aurora* swarmed up the rigging to take him off, he fought like a madman to share the

death of the ship he had driven to destruction. They carried him, screaming and fighting, aboard the *Aurora*, and, as they lifted him over the side, the *Sea Horse* dipped, bow first, and shot from sight under the arctic waters.

"——and that's how it was, sir," Marshall finished his tale to old man Simpson, in the offices of the Simpson Whaling and Navigation Company, on Market Street, in San Francisco, six weeks later. "I lost her. That's all there is to it. I tried to go down with her, but they yanked me off. It ain't no use sayin' I'm sorry, sir, but God knows I am."

He rose and picked up his hat.

"That's all, sir," he said wearily. "I'll be goin'."

"How's the young lady gettin' on?" old Simpson asked casually, as Marshall put his hand on the doorknob.

"Huh? Oh—why—why, she's gettin' all right. She's over at Alameda now. Yes, she's all right, I guess. The doctor says she'll get well O. K. if they keep her in a dry climate."

Simpson tapped idly on his desk with a pencil point.

"I see," he mused. "Gettin' well, huh? Warm climate! I see. Captain Walters is quittin' the sea next trip o' the *William D.* I reckon you'd have time to get married and be ready to take her out on her next run 'twixt here and Callas, huh? She's a fine cabin in her, son, an' I reckon the climate 'twixt here an' there's about right for a girl in her shape. What say?"

Marshall stared at him for a full minute in dumb bewilderment, then made a stumbling step toward him with outstretched, pleading hand.

"Do—do you mean, sir—that—that you'll——"

His voice choked, and he tore at his collar with his fingers.

"I reckoned on you for a man that'd do the right thing," Simpson growled at him. "I bet on it an' I won. Now get the hell out o' here, 'cause I got work to do. Get hitched, and report to take out the *William D.* for Callas on the eighth o' next month."

BACK FROM NATURE



WITH a long pad of white paper balanced upon his knee, a pencil in his fingers, and grim despair in the wrinkles of his good-looking countenance, Alfred van Osdale lounged back in his chair and stared at the walls of his apartment.

"Seventeen thousand five hundred and fifty," he said slowly, for the tenth time. "And about four hundred with which to pay it. The end of the rope is visible without the aid of a telescope. They are ringing the final bell for Alfred. Faintly I can hear the siren call of the train starter at the Grand Central, and I can already see an advertisement in the papers of an apartment to let."

Flight was the one way out of the morass of financial troubles in which Van Osdale found himself helplessly floundering. On the day before, he had received a letter from Colonel Woolson, demanding the payment of five thousand dollars on an ancient loan, and the colonel's language had been devoid of both courtesy and kindness. He had even threatened, and spoken pointedly of the Ludlow Street jail, which is no place for an active citizen.

Van Osdale had galloped through one sizable fortune. When it was gone, he had vaguely determined to "do something," but, instead, he had borrowed from his friends, hoping for the something to turn up that would enable him to repay them.

Careless, cynical in his attitude to-

ward life, with a generous nature and a pleasing personality, he had drifted down the tide of indifference until he had struck.

"There being nothing else to do," he soliloquized, crumpling the sheets into a ball and tossing it from him, "I will evade the consequences, plead not present, and render further unpleasantness impossible by taking a journey. I will go far away to mysterious climes, where they have no post offices."

That night's Western Express from Forty-second Street and Park Avenue bore the cheerful person of Van Osdale. He stood upon the brass-railed observation platform of the last car and blew a kiss to the departing city.

"Good-by, town," he said lightly. "We've been good pals, and I'll always think of you."

Five days later, the pin point on the map of Montana called Cascade received an addition to the populace. Alfred van Osdale's name decorated the register of the Mountain Hotel, and the New Yorker handed his grips to a bell boy.

"Staying long in Cascade, Mr. van Osdale?" inquired the clerk.

"One can never tell," the traveler replied. "I may live and die here. Do you get the New York papers?"

The life that ensued for Mr. van Osdale in Cascade was not interesting. It was free from annoyance, and his mail no longer contained letters referring to his indebtedness. Gradually he grew quiet in spirit. A great calmness came

over him. His past life slowly faded away into a hazy mist, and he rarely thought of the old glitter and gayety. In time, he made the acquaintance of a sheep baron named Grayson, who strove to interest him in the business of sheep.

"A man with your brains," Grayson told him, "could make a fortune with a sheep ranch."

"Unfortunately," Van Osdale replied, "it requires capital to start a sheep ranch, and at the present time my capital is—tied up."

"I've got a proposition that ought to attract you," the sheepman continued, and Van Osdale listened with apparent interest simply because Grayson was a friend and an entertaining talker.

For six months Van Osdale lived in Cascade without a disturbed moment. Then came a week of carnival arranged by the patriotic citizens, and with it the traveling theatrical stock company playing "Red Feather," "The Little Minister," and "Arizona." Cascade put on its Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes and prepared for frivolity. On the second night of the carnival, Van Osdale was introduced to Myrtle King, the leading lady of the stock company.

"My, my," said Miss King, "but it is good to meet somebody from New York out here in this wilderness."

"I didn't say so," Van Osdale laughed.

"I can tell a New York man three miles away on a dark night," she replied. "They don't cut clothes like yours west of Tenth Avenue. I wonder whether the old burg is managing to worry along without me. What would you give right now to walk into Louis Martin's with an appetite, and hand your hat to the gentlemanly pirate on the door?"

"Your painting fails to arouse my interest," Van Osdale answered. "Broadway has long since ceased to allure me. That is why I came to Cascade. Here I have the free, pure air of the open plains. The men I meet are one-hundred-per-cent regular human beings. There is no affectation or false pretense in Cascade, and we are

all simple, wholesome, healthy people, without bad habits or hobnailed livers. I never knew what living really meant until the last six months. Therefore, you will pardon me when I say that I wouldn't give two bits to be back on Broadway, and if I were there I would willingly sacrifice a leg to be in Cascade."

Miss King gazed seriously into Van Osdale's face, and then smiled.

"The big town must have handed you a wallop," she said slowly. "Wine, women, or Wall Street?"

Van Osdale grinned.

"Not all of us come out limping," he returned, and the subject was dropped.

In the solitude of his own room late that evening he devoted considerable thought to the girl whom he had just met. She was young for a leading lady. There was a youthful, optimistic, unspoiled note in her laughter, and a freshness in her eyes and her smile that made her different from other actresses whom he had met. He recalled various things she had said during the evening. He brought before him a picture of her attractive face, and recalled the three lines of woe or dissatisfaction or melancholy—the three faint furrows at the corner of her eyes. She was interesting beyond the ordinary, he concluded. He would see her as often as possible during the brief stay of her company in Cascade.

On the following evening he saw her play *Lady Babbie* in "The Little Minister," and was astonished by the excellence of her acting. At nine o'clock that night he fell in love with her, very suddenly, very unexpectedly, and very completely. At the moment, Miss King was dancing about the stage in the character of Barrie's lovable little madcap.

Van Osdale met her after the play, and they had supper, just as they might have done on dear old Broadway. Stirred to speech by the unusual emotion that possessed him, the New Yorker went back into history and told the truth about his presence in Cascade. The girl listened intently, gazing across the table at this somewhat unusual man.

"I was right, wasn't I?" she said, when he paused. "The old town *did* take a wallop at you. You're not alone, however, in your banishment. Gaze upon me. You wouldn't think, would you? that once I tossed my hat into the metropolitan ring, and the chief city stared superciliously at my hat and me and finally ordered a servant to throw us both out. I wonder if you know how it feels to be a New York failure—good enough for the jay towns; a clear hit in Bucyrus, Ohio; a clean-cut triumph in Palmetto, Kansas; an undeniable success in Des Moines, Iowa; and in New York—a lemon; something that tried to make good and didn't; the last thing they'd take out of the theater in case of fire."

Van Osdale looked again to make sure that the girl was not joking. But the bright blue eyes were not laughing now. The three little lines at her eyes were deeper, and her lips were tight together.

"It's hard to believe that," he said sympathetically. "In the first place, you're too young to be talking that way. Any one who can act as you can—as you did to-night—hasn't any business talking about failure, even in New York."

"You don't happen to know what I know," Miss King answered. "There were years of it—years when I lived on the edge of the Harlem River in a room that cost me three dollars a week, and when I studied ten hours a day, sometimes without enough to eat. It's the same old story that a thousand girls can tell. I used to ride up and down on those elevated trains pulled by the dinky little engines. Remember them? I knew every paving stone in Broadway. There wasn't a theatrical manager's office boy in the whole lane who didn't know me."

"It took a number of years to convince me that the managers were right and I was wrong, and that the best I'd ever be was good enough for the Western circuits and number-two companies and one-night stands. Once I had more ambition than you'd think one human being could carry around, but now I've

got a steady job, on the road; always on the road. Whenever I get as near New York as Binghamton, they begin to blow up the railroad tracks. So I've forgotten my high ambitions. I've passed up the big town because it passed me up."

"And you're—twenty-three?" Van Osdale hazarded.

"Twenty-four."

"We're a couple of expatriates, aren't we?" he went on thoughtfully. "But for different reasons. Do you ever feel a horrible, unkillable longing to return and take another try at it?"

"Sometimes," she confessed. "But it's getting so I can down that. Time—you know what time will do."

There ensued a long pause, during which Van Osdale stared into Miss King's frank eyes. They studied each other during these few seconds, as if each was already aware of what the other was thinking. Finally Van Osdale said:

"I've got a friend here in Cascade. His name is Grayson, and he's been trying to get me to go into the sheep business for six months. I told him frankly that my finances were a mere trace, and he generously offered to stake me—to hand over a herd of sheep that was guaranteed to reproduce itself in two years, and, in addition, a fully equipped ranch house about twelve miles from town. I've been out there with him. Once he almost had me talked into it, but I've held off because—well, I'm a gregarious sort of chap. I like to have people near me, and I can't stand loneliness. Grayson says that, with ordinary luck, I can make a fortune in five years, and without doing any particularly hard work. The house out there is roomy, cheerful, and up on a hill. You can see ten miles from every window. It's got hot and cold water, a telephone, and everything you'd find in a New York flat except the dumb-waiter."

"Has it an oak sideboard in the dining room?" Miss King inquired softly.

"It has, with a big mirror in it," Van Osdale replied. "There are four barns, and the grass is always green. Out

there the sun seems to shine a little more brightly than here, and the air would cure a dying man in two hours. I'm wondering."

"What?"

"Well," more slowly and looking into the blue eyes, which were bluer and brighter now than ever, "you and I are two bits of flotsam that the city has cast off. They don't want us down there under the elevated railroad. They've put carbolic acid on their doormats and burned out the word 'Welcome.' But here in Montana we can be regular people and have a motor car. We can grow rich out here, letting sheep have large families and selling their wool; and, after a while, we can rent a special train and go down there to little old Gayburg-on-the-Gilt, with enough money to singe a wet dog. We can hire a couple of floors at the Waldorf and trot around town papering the streets with gold leaf. You can forget this theatrical job of yours. How would Mrs. Alfred van Osdale sound to you instead of Myrtle King?"

"It has more syllables to it," the girl laughed. "There's no use saying 'this is so sudden,' because 'sudden' doesn't hit it. This is what you might call making a fool out of instantaneous. Are you in earnest?"

Whereupon, Van Osdale uncorked the vials of his persuasiveness and conversed with such earnestness that Miss King finally held up her hand, as the referee does when he bestows the laurel upon the winning gladiator.

"You have said enough," she exclaimed. "I accept your offer of marriage. I would have accepted it if you had not said a word in argument, because I will admit that I was fond of you from the moment I met you."

"You will marry me?" Van Osdale cried.

"At the end of the week. I will hand in my resignation to-morrow, and finish up the present engagement. In the meantime you can see your rich sheepherder and tell him that you have agreed to go into the business. We will be married on Sunday, and I'll scurry around and buy a trousseau between

now and then. I have a strong feeling that we shall get on beautifully together."

The following morning, Van Osdale bought the wedding ring. He met Grayson and explained to him what had happened, and the sheepman pounded him on the back, and spoke enthusiastic words. Miss King resigned from the stock company amid a torrent of managerial objurgation, and dropped into the Metropolitan Emporium, on Main Street, where she purchased the usual outfit of the blushing bride-to-be. Hand in hand, Van Osdale and his future partner wandered about Cascade, like two happy children, and the Cascade *Weekly Democrat* printed a piece about the coming event. The minister was notified to hold himself in readiness for a quick hitch.

It was early on Saturday afternoon, the final day of her singleness, that Myrtle King wandered idly along Main Street until she came to the railroad station, where a long freight train from the East had paused to drop a car or two. The brakemen were hustling back and forth, uncoupling box cars, waving their hands, and uttering the strange, seallike cries of their species, and the actress regarded them with incurious eyes. In the middle of the long string were a dozen or more flat cars, loaded with coaches of a dark-red color, and as she looked the girl felt a sudden stirring within her.

She approached the flats. The idle glance departed from her eyes, and her pulses beat more rapidly. In addition to the red coaches on the flats, there were half a dozen diminutive, rusty, pig-back locomotives, with the glass broken in their rickety cabs, their smokestacks tilted drunkenly, and the marks of great age everywhere about them. They were propped up on the flat cars with timbers, their small driving wheels blocked beneath them. Myrtle King smiled. Her eyes traveled to the red coaches, from which time had effaced the paint. They, also, were on their last wheels. Their window frames were guiltless of glass, except for a fragment here and there; the tin sheet-

ing on their roofs was curled and rusted; their brake handles were loose in the sockets; and they were, without exception, battered old veterans. But upon the narrow panel above the windows Miss King read the words, "Metropolitan Elevated Railroad Company," and her heart chugged within her.

Inside one of the coaches, his feet cocked up on what had once been a good cane seat, sprawled a person with red whiskers and a harmonica, upon which he was laboriously playing "On the Banks of the Wabash Far Away." To him Myrtle spake.

"These cars came from New York, didn't they?" she asked.

The man took down his feet and removed the organ of music from his whiskers.

"They did," he replied.

"It's queer to see them away out here in Montana," Myrtle went on. "They're the old coaches of the elevated road, aren't they, and those are the funny little engines that used to pull them?"

The man nodded.

"This bunch o' junk came from the yards in Harlem, where they've been laid up since the elevated was electrified," he said. "They're sold to an excavating company in Pasadena, but why, I don't know, for them engines couldn't pull a spider web apart. I came along to see that nobody stole 'em in the night. Are you from New York?"

"I've ridden in those very coaches, I'll venture to say," the girl replied. "It gives you a funny feeling to see them so far from home." She cast an affectionate glance toward the disreputable coaches. "Well, take good care of them, mister," she laughed. "They're old friends. Thanks for telling me."

Miss King walked slowly away. The freight train rattled through its length and began to move. The man with the whiskers waved his hand, and disappeared.

Somewhere in the air before her, the girl again saw herself scampering up the elevated steps in New York. Again she heard the screech of the brakes and the fussy puffing of the locomotives as they

barked their way downtown, carrying her and the other thousands to the troubles of the day. She felt the cinders against her cheek, as she stood on the platform, wedged between paper-reading doers of the day's work.

Those had been the hard, dreary, heart-breaking days, when managers had rebuffed and insulted her, and when the flame of art had flickered dimly. And now the old veterans of the rails had put their labors behind them, and were coming to the great West, where she had come. Behind them, they left the big town, where there were fine, glossy electric trains and skimming taxicabs, and millions of electric lights and gay restaurants and well-dressed people. Miss King suddenly came to a stop. She pressed her patent-leather pump into a bit of turf and regarded it with deep concern. In the back of her mind was the dim knowledge that at about seven in the evening an east-bound express train stopped at Cascade.

There was an unoccupied seat in the chair car of the Eastern Express, and Myrtle King dropped into it with a contented sigh.

"Poor Alfred!" she said, a trifle wistfully.

Then the train started—for New York.

In the meantime, Alfred van Osdale had informed his few intimates of the big event, and had been congratulated with fitting pomp and circumstance. It was probably four o'clock on Saturday afternoon when he finally stopped in at the café of the Mountain Hotel and urged George to mix him a Manhattan cocktail, and take something himself on account of the happy event of the morrow. George complied. Mr. van Osdale sauntered to the layout of free lunch, of which George was usually proud. To-day he was more than merely proud.

"Something special this afternoon, Mr. van Osdale," he said, with the air of a host. "Just came in on the morning train. I reckon you don't get salomi out in Montana very often. Cut yourself a slice or two and taste it. It's delicious."

"Salomi?" Van Osdale queried. "Didn't know you could get it in the West. It's a great sausage back East, but—"

"Wait till I get you a fresh one," George said, hurrying from behind the bar. "This is the real stuff. It makes ordinary sausage taste like dirt."

He knocked off a board from a box that stood in the corner, and Van Osdale watched him smilingly. The stenciled words on the board that fell away attracted him.

"Why, this comes straight from New York," he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Sure," said George proudly.

Van Osdale picked up the board and stared at it.

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" he said, half to himself. "This stuff comes from old Rudolph Grossmeyer's place on Third Avenue and Sixteenth Street, George. You don't have to tell me it's good salomi, because Rudolph Grossmeyer is famous for it. His old-fashioned restaurant and bar are show places in New York. He's been making homemade salomi for thirty years, and the epics go down there when they yearn for a real German meal. Many's the time, George, that I've eaten in Grossmeyer's—pumpernickel and pig's knuckles with sauerkraut and Wurzburger beer and salomi and all the rest of the stuff you can't make out from the bill. George, it makes my mouth water just to see his name again. I can remember the night after the Yale-Harvard game, a crowd of us went down there and— But it wouldn't interest you. Here's happy days."

He picked up his glass and sipped the cocktail.

"A happy marriage," said George, following suit.

With a preoccupied air, Van Osdale left the contented disburser of Grossmeyer's salomi and walked out into the sunlight of Cascade. To his intense surprise, the plain box of sausage had jolted him. The long-dim picture upon the canvas of his memory suddenly brightened, and as he strode along, he visualized a scene of massive build-

ings, clanging surface cars, yelling truckmen, and the never-ending clatter and turmoil of the big town.

"It's six months and more," he reflected. "That money business—pshaw! There must be some way out of a hole. Other men get into trouble and get out again, and why couldn't I—"

A freight train, tooting in the distance, drew his attention. At seven in the evening a train came from the west, paused momentarily at Cascade, and then went on. Van Osdale blinked, and turned off Main Street.

In the smoking car of the seven o'clock eastbound, Van Osdale settled himself comfortably and drew out a cigar. The lights of Cascade moved slowly out of his sight.

"I suppose I'm a scoundrel," he said. "Poor Myrtle!"

It is possible, in these days of modern luxuries, for two persons to traverse a continent on the same train and yet remain unseen by each other, and that is what Miss King and Mr. van Osdale did. In the Grand Central Station the two detrained and walked forth, sniffing the familiar air with unconcealed ecstasy, listening to the well-known roar of cars, cabs, and miscellaneous cacophonies with ears that tingled, and gazing upon the metropolitan crowds with glistening, happy eyes. They went forward slowly and the city crushed them to her bosom. The lost ones had returned.

Let us drop a coin in the slot machine of time and watch it whirl away the months until we are far, far from that certain Saturday in Cascade, Montana.

A little voice is whispering: "And so they were married." You are surprised! Yes, but wait.

In the chill dusk of an autumn evening, Mr. van Osdale descended the steps of a gray castle on Riverside Drive, fastening his gloves. He had been calling upon his friends, the Oliphants. He paused for an instant, the picture of prosperity, health, and human contentment. As he hesitated, he took forth a

cigar, and a match flashed in his fingers.

Then he tossed away the burned stick and pulled at the cigar. A limousine passed him, so close that he could not avoid glancing in, and, as he did so, his eyes rested for a fleeting instant upon a charming face. It was shaded by a fur hat, and the dainty head lay cushioned in the silken upholstery. Two bright eyes gleamed inside the car, and instantly Van Osdale recognized Myrtle King. He stared after the retreating tail light, and smiled somewhat grimly.

In the flying limousine, the lady gathered her furs more closely about her.

She glanced at the diamond-studded watch upon her slim wrist as the machine turned into a cross street, and drew up before an apartment building of the expensive type.

Yes, they were married. Perhaps it would be better to say "were *both* married"; but not to each other. Bless you, no! For *this* was the town of New York and *that* was Montana, and as the poet might have had it if only he had thought:

For East is East and West is West,
And separate paths they roam;
For they who would wed
Where the sheep are fed,
Have a different way at home.



A WINTER DAWN

UNTOUCHED by crimson or by gold,
Its pure and fleeting marble rose
Beyond the wall of eastern snows—
Ethereal, Pentelic, cold.

Its fragile towers were high and thin,
Symbol of beauty passionless,
Of all inviolate loveliness;
And not of earth the pearl therein—

The pearl too precious to endure,
Seen where the heaven's ghostly shell
Holds in its vast and sapphire cell
A nacre infinitely pure.

So the marmorean glory bleak
Spoke of the snows of beauty's home;
Then that blue sea withdrew its foam,
And we that witnessed could not speak.

GEORGE STERLING.



THE loveliest girl in the world told Dean that since he seemed to care so little whether or not she would marry him, owing to his generally blasé attitude toward life, she wanted him to look into his mirror and realize what a softened, ineffectual person he had come to be, a distorted image of the man originally intended. Dean tried to argue with light, tea-fight bantering, knowing in his heart that nothing more vital than hurt vanity was roused.

"You remember the fairy story," said the loveliest girl, "about the queen who stood in front of the magic glass and demanded daily, 'Mirror, mirror, tell me truly'—and so on. And you know the mirror told the truth. That is what you must do, Lynn Dean. It is what none of your friends can do for you."

The loveliest girl played with some roses to hide hurt, quivering lips.

"I suppose," reflected Dean, looking out at the foggy New York street, "I suppose I'm fagged from the mere ennui of living without necessity of work. I'm a near-neurasthenic sort of person. You are quite the loveliest girl, Ora—it doesn't take a mirror to tell you, either—and I ought to be the happiest man because you care."

"But I don't care," she protested, piqued womanhood rising to the surface. "I don't care for a man who has nothing to do but spend the money his father made for him—and be bored as a consequence. I don't believe you have the power of enthusiasm left. You've lived in a hotbed New York apartment,

with everything so perfectly artistic and harmonious that the arrangement of your luncheon centerpiece is the object of your most violent criticism. You've never had that feeling of boyish thrill when fire wagons go by, or some one waves a flag, and the band plays 'My Country,' with the horns way out of tune. You need bromidic exhilaration, the ability to cry when the heroine falls into the villain's power.

"Oh, I know the people who have it furnish their parlor in plush and exhibit a golden-oak rocker in the dining-room bay window. But it's what the world needs—melodrama, the unreality and deception of the footlights, instead of seeing everyday life in a monotonous, superior fashion. You see neither black nor white like happy people, only confusing, deadly gray, the inevitable color scheme one arrives at after having carefully barricaded any honest chance for work or achievement!"

The loveliest girl rose slowly, intimating that the call was at an end. Dean reached out his carefully manicured hand to take back the ring she held out to him. Even that did not rouse a pang, although he knew that Fred Latham was eagerly waiting for the chance to replace it with a more elaborate offering.

"What would you advise?" he asked jocularly.

The blue in the loveliest girl's eyes turned to serious gray.

"Find yourself," she said softly. "Look in your mirror, and go away—go some place where no one knows of you—and shatter the reflection."

"And if I do?" He could smile at the advice.

"If you do," she whispered, "come back—and tell me."

Dean bowed himself out of the room. He made some light remark to the old footman who showed him the door. Outside, they were putting up wreaths of evergreen and holly. The loveliest girl's father clung to the ancient English fashion of early exterior decorating at Christmas. It struck Dean as gaudy and unnecessary.

The crowds hurrying past while he strolled to his motor annoyed him. He hated crowds. Something in their holiday spirit irritated him—partly because of the loveliest girl's criticism, partly because Christmas was a bore, a time when one gave things to a long list of people, ate an uncomfortably heavy dinner, and then rushed to affairs where you stood under mistletoe, laden with favors, and said and did foolish things.

The cab whirled down the muddy avenue. Dean wondered what would be said of the broken engagement. After all, he was glad of it. He was not worth the loveliest girl. "Find himself"—he wondered if she meant going down on the East Side and giving away baskets of groceries, with a blue-looking bird guarding the pile. There were people who did such things; they called it slumming.

He drew out his engagement book. The Jamisons were to be his guests for dinner—bores both of them. After that they were booked with Mrs. Oddington for a new musical comedy—another bore; he hated musical comedy. The club was giving a midnight vaudeville. He was a patron if he remembered correctly. Bore again; he loathed those affairs where tired performers goaded themselves on to capturing enormous salaries.

The cab stopped in front of his apartment. Climbing out, he paused on the wet curb, ignoring the chauffeur's questioning gesture. The mirror thing bothered him. He did not like being told that he lacked the enthusiasm of life when he was sure that there was no

such thing, that it was merely noisy hilarity. All his life he had lived apart from immediate relatives, the orphan son of a self-made millionaire. All his life he had picked and chosen the delicacies of life, the things that wise men taste but once for experience. He had selected the loveliest girl as he would the loveliest bric-a-brac; had thought of her in the position of his wife as he would of a rare marble in a gilded drawing-room cabinet. The rush and bustle of the workaday world had never reached his ears. Tales of toil and failure which inspire and create sympathy he had never listened to. Not for an instant had Dean touched hands with the under crust.

"Find yourself," she had said; "and if you do, come back and tell me."

He gave a short laugh, a hint of annoyance in its ring. Dean was accustomed to flattery of a delicate sort—just a suggestion of it, as a chef flavors his best dishes with something that the gourmand cannot detect, yet would vaguely miss.

"I'll go away," he said suddenly. "I'll go—I'll go to the first strange place I hear mentioned—I'll spend Christmas there, and see if the 'mirror' breaks!"

He turned and went inside.

Dean kept his word with all men, though he had never been called upon for serious pledges; therefore, he was honest with himself. Whatever place was first mentioned to him, there he would spend Christmas week, providing it was within reaching distance. None of his engagements for the holiday interested him. Ordinarily, he would have devoted a proper amount of time to the loveliest girl, but that was a thing of the past.

There was something genuinely novel in his rash promise. Suppose the first place was Yonkers, or Grand Rapids, Michigan, or Yokohama! The gambler's instinct was astir, and he even smiled when his man, Hallam, interrupted his reverie before the open fire.

Dressing for dinner, Hallam, bending over refractory cuff links, said with a modest cough:

"Beg pardon, Mr. Dean, but might I have the clothes in the—basket?"

"I've always told you to help yourself," said Dean lazily, "when they are in the basket."

There was a slight emphasis to the last phrase.

"Thank you, Mr. Dean," said Hallam promptly.

"Have you a special use for them?" asked Dean, idly curious.

"Yes, sir. Miss Myrtle"—Miss Myrtle was Mrs. Oddington's maid—"is quite a philanthropist. She's been collecting clothes for a missionary to the—"

Dean put up his hands in protest; he had summoned his own doom.

"—to the Tennessee mountaineers, sir," finished Hallam blandly; "the plateau country, where they don't know the slaves are freed yet, some of them. There's not many missionaries get down there, sir. You go to Chattanooga, and then take the branch line to Tracy City, and change again for Cowin—that's the end of nowhere, so Miss Myrtle said the missionary said. Then you ride back into what they call the brush in a buckboard, sir, right into moonshiners' land."

"Thank you, Hallam." Dean chuckled at his own dilemma. "I hope the clothes will do some good."

"Oh, they will, sir," gushed Hallam, knowing what a rise it would give him in Miss Myrtle's eyes. "Thank you, sir, many times."

Waiting for his guests, Dean sat vaguely wondering what the plateau land of Tennessee was to yield for Christmas in the way of mirror smashing. He had spent a little time in Asheville and Palm Beach, bored by morning musicals and golfing parties, but mountaineers, moonshiners, were new terms to him. He wondered whether he had better take trunks, and whether he would find a good hotel. Hallam, with his damnable English exactness, had given him the precise route. Chattanooga, Tracy City, Cowin—then you drive into the brush in a buckboard! And the loveliest girl had said: "Find

yourself—go away where no one knows of you, and smash the reflection!"

The Jamisons were gushing outside.

"Awfully glad," said Dean nonchalantly, preparing for a tornado of praise concerning his last art treasure. "This is a good-by party, too. I forgot to mention it. No, not a Christmas house party—just South a ways on business."

"Won't you-all 'light and rest your hat?"

After traveling ten hours in a Southern branch railway from Chattanooga, in unheated accommodation trains, with stiff-back seats, stopping at every good-looking tree stump—traveling in company with a handful of natives who talked about corn crops, and how the sheriff smoked four cigars a day, to say nothing of a woman with screaming twins, who climbed persistently on the back of Dean's seat to surprise him with sticky embraces—the quaint Southern greeting was an ovation.

Uncle Jabe, proprietor of the Cowin Inn and Livery, stood waiting respectfully while Dean gingerly carried his bags into the hotel front room. He had wisely decided at the last not to take a trunk. The loungers watched curiously as he took in the surroundings with quick glances.

"I'm going into the brush," he said to Uncle Jabe. "They tell me you take orders for the—buckboard."

"Right, stranger," Uncle Jabe answered, wondering what the initials on the bags stood for, and whether the owner of the broadcloth overcoat, unmistakably mink-lined, was a new species of revenue inspector.

"I'll stay here overnight," Dean continued, trying to convince himself that such a thing was possible. "You're not crowded?"

"Won't be nobody hyar till the first of the year," the old man assured him. "You-all kin have the three front rooms if it pleases. Does 'em good to be occupied."

"Thanks."

Dean was waiting for a boy to carry

his stuff upstairs. The old man stooped and grasped a handle of each grip.

"This way, stranger," he said, pushing a yellow hound dog out of the way. "Town never changes much—only progression lately has been a Chinese laundry. You-all are from the North, I take it?"

Dean nodded. He felt his hands sliding out for possession of the grips. He followed the proprietor up the rickety stairs. There was a musty chill in the atmosphere of the second floor. The dirty, white doors of the rooms were "sweat shut." The key to the front chamber rattled helplessly in the old-fashioned lock. Uncle Jabe finished the unlocking by putting one shoulder against the panels and pushing vigorously.

A four-poster bed with only the tick as adornment, a three-legged chair, and a golden-oak washstand, with a tin candlestick and sulphur matches, comprised the furnishings. Uncle Jabe surrendered the key gravely.

"You-all kin wash before tea," he said. "The pump's in the yard."

Dean thanked him.

"You-all has business in the brush?" the old man added, pausing in the doorway.

"A little. Know a good place to stay?"

"Mrs. McGuire's," boasted Uncle Jabe. "She boards the stave-factory boys, a dollar and a half a week—beaten biscuit, corn bread, fried chicken, hominy. Buckboard goes plumb by."

"I'll think it over," said Dean, turning away.

Uncle Jabe tottered downstairs. Within ten minutes, all Cowin knew that the hotel harbored a Yankee guest wearing a fur-lined coat, that the guest threw away half a cigar at a time without apparent reason, and that he might stay at Mrs. McGuire's in the brush—because he had a little business.

Fifteen miles straight riding into the brush of the plateau land in the blue December air, up the mountain slopes, through the swampy stretches, past cabins placed helter-skelter along the road, and razorback hogs that dived in and

out of the bushes like animated tea wafers retreating from pursuing guests —this before the second evening of the stranger's pilgrimage.

Bill Baker, driver of the buckboard, was half Indian, half Scotch. Three words a day were considered eloquence in him by those who knew him. Long after the stranger had leaned back resignedly to wonder why he had not consulted an alienist before booking passage to Chattanooga, they pulled a halt before a rambling log house, in front of which hound dogs and curs were congregated in desolate groups. The driver gave an inarticulate grumble and waited for his fare.

Mrs. McGuire came out to watch the buckboard disappear around a curve in the road. Then she turned to the stranger, who stood, hat in hand, looking with a mingling of repulsion and pity at this tall, gaunt woman, with sunken eyes and yellow-white hair, whose back was bent with the toil of years, and whose face twitched nervously at the prospect of speaking with a Yankee stranger.

"You-all wants to rest?" she asked gently.

"If I may," said the stranger. "I won't be here long."

She folded her large, reddened hands across her thin chest in mild defiance.

"What is you-all's business?" she asked.

The stranger hesitated. To tell Mrs. McGuire that he had come to look for the last time in the magic mirror at his weakened self, and then to smash the damning evidence, was a temptation to his whimsical mind. But something in her serious gaze and the calm arms folded across her narrow chest disconcerted him.

"It is not important business," he began.

"You-all better not stay hyar," she said slowly. "They got my man ten years ago—this December."

She turned and walked into the wretched doorway, the dogs swarming after her. He heard children crying, and two white-faced, sleepy boys peered out of the rudely cut window. The

stranger was cold and hungry. Money mocked him. The absolute change in his environment caused the ennui of the last thirty-four years to vanish. He yearned for Hallam, bringing in the morning papers and mail, standing behind his chair in the perfectly appointed den, and inquiring: "Anything else, sir? What hour do you wish the horse? Or will you ride to-day?"

"But I'm not an inspector or an agent," he protested, as Mrs. McGuire's thin figure fluttered out of sight. "I'm here for—"

"If it's newspaper writings about us-all," the woman answered through the door, "there's room for you in Stewart Folks' cabin. Follow the trail. He is Yankee-educated in free schools."

The quiet scorn in her voice made the stranger wince.

"Thank you," he said, replacing his hat.

He shouldered the grips and started down the road, deep rutted with muddy furrows lightly powdered with snow.

The first cabin was deserted, the second inhabited by an old woman who was busy dipping snuff with a brush made of sweet-gum wood. She told him that Stewart Folks' cabin was "on a piece."

He found his man inside the shack, coaxing a fire on the hearth. The earthen floor was covered with sacking, and gaping cracks at the windows and door were rudely stuffed with rags and cotton waste. His host's thin figure was sprawling before the fireplace, a book or so beside him, and a thatched tousled head bent anxiously forward to see if the blaze would develop.

There was little furniture in the cabin—a four-poster bed with a corded mattress, covered with turkey-red calico, a homemade pine table, with a tin coffee-pot, a spider, a few pieces of thick, white china, and some "store-goods" supplies. Two sawed-off shotguns crossed each other on a shelf, and a faded Confederate flag drooped above them. A powderhorn, probably dating from Revolutionary times, and belonging to "grandpap's grandpap," and an old-fashioned squirrel rifle hung be-

low. An attempt at a curtain concealed more personal belongings. This was the cabin where the stranger was to summon truth from the magic mirror.

"And they live here," he thought, hating to disturb the grotesque tableau that the mountain boy presented; "they live here—and believe in God—and can laugh!"

Five minutes later, Dean had been told the mountaineer's slogan—"Such as we-all have, half of it belongs to you-all." He was seated on a perilous chair, trying to explain that he would like to stay in the brush until after Christmas, that he had no special business, was merely taking a rest cure from a very—

"Listen, stranger," said the boy, rising and opening the door.

A faint shot sounded from behind the circle of bare, sentinelike trees. He shoved the door shut, and came back, with a troubled look in his honest, brown eyes. They reminded one of a faithful spaniel's with their velvety softness.

"That's signalin'," he said frankly. "They-all know you-all are hyar."

"I don't mind," the stranger answered, offering him a cigar. "I'm not wanted. I'm not a newspaper man trying to unearth fresh copy, or a prospective hotel manager trying for a suitable resort site. I'm—a stranger."

Somehow the words did not sound foolish. They fitted into the simple, homely atmosphere of the brush-land cabin.

"I see." Stewart glanced down at the books on the floor; he noticed that the stranger was trying to read the titles. One was a history, the other a textbook on physiology. "I've been readin' a bit," he replied, as if he had been asked a question.

"Mrs. McGuire said you had been in the valley to school."

The stranger watched animation creep into the somewhat solemn features. The boy reached down to gather up his books and show the inscription of the missionary school on their flyleaves.

"They-all come up and got me," he explained, "two years ago."

"You're—"

"Eighteen. Pap died two years ago—that runs us all out except cousins on the ridge. The Folks' was strong hyar a few years ago."

"Mother dead long?" The stranger forgot his hunger.

"Never knew mom." Stewart bent over a refractory twig to poke it vigilantly. "You-all is Yankee-educated," he deduced, honest admiration in his voice.

The stranger nodded briefly.

"Harvard," he said aimlessly.

Stewart drew a long breath.

"There was a teacher in our school that had a powerful friend who knew some one who went to Harvard." He paused a moment, and then added softly: "That's a great school, I reckon."

"It is." The stranger was embarrassed at being so stared at. He felt like a reigning monarch with the populace pushing close beside his carriage. "Are you through school?" he asked, to change the subject. "Or are you back here for a vacation, or for what?"

The boy paused before he answered. Looking into the stranger's face, he must have seen a gleam of the something that the loveliest girl had seen when she steeled herself to tell Dean the truth. That—and the fact of the stranger having book learning—inspired confidence, a confidence so great that he told him what he had kept secret among his own people ever since his return.

"I've come back," he said tenderly, "to get Tamsie!"

The stranger felt a sudden interest at the mention of the name.

"Tamsie who?" he asked, with the persistence that a parent uses toward a child's halting confession.

"Tamsie Shepard," the boy told him reverently.

Both were silent, while the wind sang outside, and an occasional whine from a hound dog added to the weird discord. Stewart rose and went over to the pine table.

"I reckon you-all is hungry," he said, with strange dignity.

The stranger nodded. He could eat corn bread gladly, and fried bacon seemed to him a dish for the gods. He watched the boy as he threw raw dough into the griddle and held it over the fire. It was a pleasure to watch his movements; there was something so decided and poised about him.

Seated over the corn bread, bacon, and store tea, Stewart looked into the stranger's face and told his story.

"This hyar is feud land, stranger," he said quietly. "There's been a feud on between the Folks' and the Shepards ever since Christmas Eve, eighteen forty-six. See great-grandpap's rifle over there—every notch on it means a Shepard that was killed by a Folks. The Shepards keep count of us-all by notching a four-poster bed. Pap was killed two years ago—that left me alone. Somebody told the valley, and a missionary come up and got me. They-all fetched me into their school, and taught me Yankee things, taught me about judges, and juries, and reckonin' slowly whether a thing is right or wrong, instead of shootin' in the dark."

"What did the feud start over?" said the stranger.

"A wild pig," confessed the boy sheepishly. He was not devoid of humor. "Grandpap's pap was shootin' with Tamsie's great-grandpap. They both fired to onc and laid low a razor-back. Both said the other cheated in the shot. Fought out in the brush for nearly four hours. Then grandpap and her grandpap come along and took a hand in. When they-all went home, the feud was started. There never was any reason why it shouldn't start—nobody to stop 'em, or tell 'em better. It's never died down. Folks' and Shepards never buried the hatchet. And all because of a wild pig—Tamsie—"

"What does Tamsie think?"

The boy turned to him with a sudden wild appeal.

"Tamsie's mountain bred, and all for the brush land. Tamsie's sixteen. She's willin' to be married, stranger, but not in the valley."

"What does she want?"

"Her pap's a moonshiner." There was an abandon in his confidences. "Their cabin ain't but a piece away. Tamsie and me meet at the old Mountain House about a mile down the road. Used to be a big hotel before the war, been boarded up ever since. Nothin' but bullet holes, bats, and snakes left there—but her pap never comes near. So we-all meet there and—plan."

"What does she want?" the stranger persisted.

"She wants her pap to stop the feud. Lordy, there ain't any more to shoot off 'cept her pap and me. The ridge cousins ain't near enough to be good aim. Tamsie thinks her pap might stop if I'd give up the school ideas—Yankee ideas, stranger. Tamsie wants to stay in the mountains with her pap—and me. Moonshinin's right in her eyes. She's never heard different. She says her pap will shoot me on sight because I'm trying to take her back into the valley."

"And what do you want?"

"To be minister married, and have her live in a valley cabin, like the teachers tell us to. I want her to have store-boughten clothes, and not work like plateau women have to. Tamsie's mom died of overwork. After she was real bad, her pap got a mule and drove into the valley for a bottle of patent medicine. When he came back, Tamsie ran out to tell him she was dead! That's the way plateau women live, stranger."

The boy was silent, but he was thinking of his own mother.

"What is it you want to be?" asked the stranger.

"A lawyer." The thatched head drooped, conscious of the mightiness of his aspirations. "I ain't got anythin' to start with," he added grimly, "but these hyar arms. You-all know when a man loves a girl, and wants to take her afore God and man, that he kin work for her till he drops. I loved Tamsie since I was knee high—and she loves back as hard. Pap or no pap, feud or no feud, she belongs to me—and I'm goin' to get her." The New World ethics that the valley had given him faded as he spoke.

8

The stranger's ideas of missionary schools were incoherent and vague. But he rejoiced at finding a rough, uncut diamond like this boy, unacquainted with ennui and disillusionment, teeming with energy. It inspired him, it distracted him from mere details such as the absence of Hallam and the question how he was going to sleep on the corded mattress or the heap of ragged quilts on the floor.

Together, they outlined a future for the boy. It would be a novel experience, the stranger thought, to finance some one personally, instead of just giving checks to Mrs. Oddington for her charity musicales and bazaars. He could see Stewart finishing high school, and rushing into law school, and then reading law in Drake's office in Baltimore; Drake had been one of his father's philanthropies, always snubbed when he tried to return the kindnesses that he had received. Tamsie could be polished off in no time; a woman is quick at suggestion, and, loving Stewart, she would probably outstrip him in her eagerness to please. They could settle somewhere in the South, a small town would be best. He would send them things at Christmas, and run down occasionally. No wonder people liked slumming! It exhilarated one.

For the first time in many years the stranger was conscious of two things: First, that his heritage of birth was being initiated into active use; it gave him quick comprehension and judgment with which to advise this boy—and a certain glowing pride that such was the case. Secondly, that he was envious of this mountaineer's love for Tamsie, a crude, sixteen-year-old mountain girl. He longed to rouse in himself a like whole-hearted, absorbing emotion.

When night came, and the boy set out to meet Tamsie at the forsaken Mountain House, his gun over his shoulder, his eyes glowing with expectant happiness, the stranger promised him the finest Christmas present he had ever had.

"You-all ain't foolin'?"

A sudden darkening of the eyes re-

called with what primitive material he was modeling.

"Wait and see. I'm going to give you Tamsie. Now run along and listen patiently while she tells you she won't go into the valley to be minister married. I'm going to talk to Tamsie, and tell her something that will change her no to a yes."

Again came that quick, worshiping glance. The simple trust of the boy as he tried to thank his new friend, and then broke away rudely to trudge off over the frozen ground, sent a rush of emotion into the stranger's untried heart. The boy had left him with his home, the best he had, had told him his secrets, had looked to him for counsel. And not once had reward entered the problem. The stranger drew a deep breath of the cold night air. He was far away from the frenzied standard of dollars, the commercial measuring stick. This was the land of moonshiners, mountaineers, honor, courage, faded brush women, hound dogs, corn cob pipes, homemade clothes, snowy roads, sneaking razorbacks, feuds, Christmas, the Cowin House, Uncle Jabe, Tamsie, and her mountain lover; the loveliest girl and the North seemed far away and indistinct.

Something was happening to the stranger. He threw himself on the creaking, corded bed, to plan what words would best explain to Tamsie

The stranger slept, the happy, dreamless sleep of a healthily exhausted body and mind.

Two days before Christmas the stranger saw Tamsie. Stewart had explained to her that some one from the North would tell in better words than his lover's halting language just why she should give up her mountain-cabin life, and come down into the valley, where she could go to a domestic-science school, while Stewart made a home for her, and a career for himself.

For three days after the stranger reached the cabin, he ate and slept, and ate again, rousing only to give an ear to the boy as he tried to expound to

himself the right and wrong of transplanting Tamsie, or to listen with drowsy interest to folk tales of the brush people, and to fragments of old Elizabethan ballads and stories that had been handed down from grandpap to pap, preserving, strangely enough, a certain unsullied form of composition, and smacking strongly of merrie England during the minstrel period.

Sometimes a brush neighbor stopped to "rest his hat" at the cabin, asking Stewart with whimsical humor when his "Yankee king" was going on, or, with a slightly ominous look, insisting that he had come to plateau land for the revenue agent, and had taken refuge in the Folks' cabin because the smattering of education had done its work, and he knew that his host would listen to "judge-'n'-jury" ideas.

Mrs. McGuire came in one morning with a plate of hot corn bread and a bundle of women's questions. The stranger was sleeping, his arms thrown over his head with a boyish gesture.

"Is he-all after—" she began defiantly.

Stewart shook his head.

"What he-all's after," he told her, with equal spirit, "ain't none of you-all's business."

Two days before Christmas, Stewart told the stranger that Tamsie would see him. The stranger did not know how long the boy had stood behind the old Mountain House's boarded sideway begging Tamsie to say the word.

"Don't want to see Yankee men," she had protested.

"You-all don't know him, honey. I can't explain no better."

Stewart bent down close to her; his buoyant strength made her sway close to him.

"Tamsie, say you-all will listen," he whispered.

"Pap won't have any meetin's much longer," she answered. "It ain't so much the feud, Stewart. Pap would forget that, if he was gone at right. It's the valley notions, the schoolin', and the goin' away, and studyin' law, and then maybe comin' back to trap him—"

"Say you'll see the stranger."

Stewart held her small hands firmly. After a moment, Tamsie said yes.

At five o'clock in the "evening," tramping up and down the deserted driveway of the old summer hotel, with its notched, fallen sides, its gaping windows filled with frozen weeds, its tower partly fallen into ruin, the stranger wondered what a man had to do in order to love so truly that such a meeting place outrivaled a garden with roses blushing in the moonlight, or a conservatory with a splashing fountain and rare tropical blossoms lending their perfume to the words you spoke.

Then, over a pile of ruined boards, came a girl, a tiny girl, with a fantastic red plaid shawl wrapped around her slender body. She came timidly toward the stranger, like a small wood animal that sniffs the baited trap, yet draws back, fascinated, wholly alarmed. She was a wonderful Scotch-Irish mountain type—with hazel eyes, fringed with dusky lashes above which two straight eyebrows lay like silent sentinels. Wisps of curly, yellow hair peeped from the border of the red shawl with willful persistence, and when she raised her hand to push them back, the stranger saw that it was small, and of fine texture, despite its redness. The oval of her face made him wonder how she could endure her mountain life, but when he looked at the small, straight mouth, which neither curved nor drooped, and noted the even, firm chin, he understood why Stewart had sought aid to plead his cause.

"Stranger," said Tamsie, with the simple directness the mountaineers employ, "I've been grievin'!"

The stranger tried to put his coat across a board, but Tamsie shook her head; she preferred to remain standing.

"You-all has come down hyar," she continued, "on some business belongin' just to you-all. Stewart Folks has took you-all in. Everything you-all say he puts alongside of his valley schools. You-all has likely told Stewart that he must take me away from pap, because my pap moonshines. Ever think why moonshinin' was right?"

She tilted her chin defiantly, in the

waning December light, and the stranger saw that the pink lips were firmly closed.

"Why, Tamsie?" he asked gently.

"Why? What do you-all raise in York State—fruit, and vegetables, and such. Government tax you-all for crops? No. What can we-all raise hyar? Nothing but corn. No market for it for miles around. Ain't it right, stranger, to make the only market we-all can of it? What else does pap know? What else can he-all learn now? What did Stewart's pap know? Pap is old, Stewart Folks is young—and school-learned. Missionary come and got him when his pap died."

"But, Tamsie," urged the stranger, "don't you see that there is another side—"

Tamsie came nearer to the stranger; she put one hand on his coat sleeve in appeal.

"You-all can make him stay with his own kind or go into the valley." She gave a bitter little laugh. "There ain't much room in the valley for his kind—it's chock-full of them that's strugglin' to do what God never planned for 'em. I can't leave pap, stranger. That's what God planned for me, or He wouldn't have put me up in the mountains with him. I know there's lots of fine things down in the valley, and in Chattanooga they say they have a machine that makes store music all alone. The women wear hats, and go to regular meetin', and have flowered carpets on their cabins, and sometimes give a play show, and have powder on their faces.

"I know all that. I ain't ignorant. But I don't want it. You-all want it. You-all was born to expect it. But Stewart Folks wasn't. And it ain't fair to him to make him think he was. They took him down in the valley, and tried tellin' him he had the wrong sort of brains—and he believed 'em, same as a hound puppy tries eatin' soap grease for the first mouthful. Then he come back to take me. Don't you-all see what that means? It means that the mountain part of him wanted me, a mountain girl, else why wouldn't he go shinin' with the valley women, and be minister mar-

ried? That's God Almighty's way of savin' Stewart Folks, stranger—he comes back for me. It's me that's got to keep on sayin' no, no, no to him—and save him!

"It ain't the feud, stranger. It ain't so much the moonshinin'. It—ain't—even pap, altogether." She struggled to be truthful. "It's just love, stranger, the real love that you-all must know about, because your eyes smile when your mouth don't. It's the real love that stands plumb up and says: 'I reckon if you-all want me, honey, you-all must stay with your own people!'"

Tamsie dropped her hand from his coat sleeve and walked away.

The December twilight, with its early moon, clouded the old Mountain House, throwing grotesque shadows over the brown, frozen road. Tamsie looked like a child, the red shawl flapping wildly in the wind. Her face was indistinct as she turned it to him, but he knew that she had lost her native shyness, for the hazel eyes flashed courageous sparks, just as the loveliest girl's had when she told him her opinion of him.

"Tamsie," he apologized, "I didn't know so very much about the boy, after all, did I?"

She shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly. Scotch reticence had risen to the surface.

"There's always two sides," the stranger admitted to himself; "the mirror and the mercury-backed view! And the boy—"

"Stranger"—Tamsie came up to him again—"did you-all ever think what it would mean if I was minister married, and valley educated, and kept on and on tryin' to live up to what he expected—and couldn't? Did you-all stop to think, when you-all and he was plannin' out the big future, tellin' him you'd help him, and talk to me, and see that I did my duty—did you-all ever think that the boy might get just a little tired of me? Mountain girls don't transplant; they just naturally die. I reckon I wouldn't be any different from the rest. I'd fade, little by little, like the mountain vines they sometimes try to make grow in the valley cabins for shade.

"Ever watch one? First the vine, he makes a mighty brave effort. Likely he perks up his head and says: 'I'll climb back to the mountains anyhow—that's what I'll do.' By and by he gets tired climbin'—sky looks powerful way off, mountains mighty rough and far away. He just naturally fades, first the top of him, and then the stalk—turns yellow and wrinkled, and the cabin people come out plumb disgusted, and chops him down. But the roots is livin', stranger, and the roots bleed for the vine, bleed for the mountain earth and air—and keep on tryin' to come up again each year, only to just die back again, and hide their head in the clay! That'd be the way with me. Ain't it reckoned better by you-all to never have him know that I couldn't—I couldn't—transplant—"

Tamsie paused. She did not find words to ask her sage question as to the wisdom of never allowing the illusion to vanish, of keeping one's imperfections carefully shielded from those who love one, rather than following them blindly into the arena to be stripped of idealistic attributes. But the stranger understood. He felt as if the girl were years older than he, as she gently pointed out his impetuous mistakes, the civilized cruelty that he had planned for the boy.

"I'm a jigsaw," he said, trying to laugh. "First I promise the boy to send you into the valley, now I'm going to send you home with my promise to keep the boy up here."

Tamsie reached up in the dim twilight to press her soft, grateful lips against the stranger's cold cheek.

"Honey, I won't grieve no more," she said, then turned and fled through the piles of fallen lumber.

Half a mile down the road the boy waited for the stranger. They were to go back to the cabin and exult in their victory, to plan the town cabin, and a pink dress for Tamsie, and store clothes for the boy. They were to forget heredity and environment, and sit over the embers of the pine fire, rejoicing that Tamsie had been conquered. Just how to tell the boy of Tamsie's quaint

logic baffled the stranger as he waited until the sound of her rough little boots had died away.

He turned in the opposite direction to trudge down the road, thinking that, after all, the world is small. It was not a week since another girl—the loveliest girl in the world, they called her—had made him look at himself in a fairy mirror, and sent him away to shatter the accusing reflection!

The boy bounded out, his gun over his shoulder, mountain fashion, a battered tin lantern feebly blinking on the pale darkness.

"I reckon you-all knows now why I want Tamsie," he said proudly.

"Stewart," began the stranger, almost brusquely to cover his confusion, "Tamsie is worth doing anything for——"

"I spied it first," the boy chuckled.

Something bulky and black behind them had made a quick gesture, something hidden behind the clump of frozen bushes, hidden until the stranger and the boy should pass along, talking of the one thing dear in life to their listener—Tamsie.

The old moonshiner's rifle missed; it was aimed at the boy. He leveled the gun again, waiting breathlessly for the boy's quick shot. But there was no return. It was the boy's first actual tribute to civilization, to the valley school. Feuds were a thing of the past, criminal, sinful. Everything that he hoped to be was expressed in that instant of self-repression.

But the stranger, stirred to the depths for the first time in his pampered, artificial life, seized the boy's gun from his startled grasp. A shot rang out on the clear air; its echo was a telltale groan.

The stranger, who had never fired on a sparrow with a popgun, whose nerves quivered when stage blanks were discharged, had shattered the mirror that told him he was a worthless, languorous man, living under false conditions. When Tamsie's father tumbled in a rough, moaning heap, and the smell of powder rose in the December air, the stranger knew that primitive impulse had dominated. Life had been attacked, it was precious to him, he caressed it,

he defied any other human being to take it from him. That vital act of injuring physically another who had attempted to do likewise—the red-blooded, fundamental act of hurting—broke the unreal reflection that he had stared at under the loveliest girl's guidance. He was looking through the mirror's blessed, empty frame into the fresh atmosphere of living, filled with thrills and impulses, good and bad, with bromidic love and hate, and the ability to meet his fellow men on common ground.

The boy rushed forward to gather the wounded man in his arms. He held the lantern above his head. The stranger, bending over to help, met the boy's horror-stricken eyes, and drew back in shame. The first exhilaration of the mirror's crash was over—the stranger returned to his accustomed ethics, and labeled himself a homicide.

"Stranger, you-all up North have Southern hate inside," breathed the boy, with divided feelings.

Neither spoke while they carried the old man to the nearest cabin, McGuire's boarding house. Mrs. McGuire ran for home remedies, while the men crowded about.

"Who got you, Ras?" asked one of them.

The old moonshiner looked up, his face distorted with pain.

"The stranger," he gasped, with honest admiration. "The stranger, boys, and — his — gun — didn't — scatter — much—neither!"

Bill Baker, the buckboard driver, came through the next morning with Christmas supplies. Being considered the best medicine man in "the parts," he was pressed into service. He walked into the cabin with something between a grunt and a question, and pushed away the stranger, who had kept an agonized vigil all night beside the moonshiner's bed.

The simple acceptance of a "regular shootin'" by the stranger" on the part of the mountaineers had completed the crashing of his mirror; before that there might have been a few jagged bits of

glass left sticking in the corners. The broad faith of the wounded man himself as compared with laws and quibbling juries roused even reverence.

Tamsie, flying into the cabin when the news reached her, had met the stranger's inarticulate apology with teary, wide-open eyes.

"Pap fired on you-all," she told him quietly, "and you-all fired back—straight. You-all is one of us, stranger, and pap won't bear no grudge."

The fact that the shoulder wound was slight did not detract from the boy's horror. The stranger, who had coincided with his struggling hopes for better things than mountain life, had dislodged his newly erected ideals by that one true shot.

Bill Baker left original advice with the stranger. He threw out his bundle of store goods in grim silence, and drove on. Only those who knew him well understood that the stranger's shot had won the mountaineer's respect and liking.

Beside the four-poster bed where Tamsie's pap lay, the stranger spent his time. He fed the old man with the gentleness of a woman, brought him water in the gourd dipper, answered his delirious questions about the North, and pretended that the Civil War had just ended, and that the claims in Washington might be settled soon. The moonshiner's pap wanted retribution for a yoke of stolen oxen.

Somewhere in the early afternoon—between two and three—Tamsie stole into the cabin and made the stranger rest.

"Pap'll sleep," she said softly, "and you-all has tired eyes. Stewart's out in the road, waitin'. He's mighty upset."

"I'm not afraid to tell him what we think now, Tamsie," whispered the stranger. "I'm beginning to believe I'm a brave man."

The boy looked at him as one would at a fallen idol; but the stranger, through the frame of his shattered mirror, reached out for the boy's best self.

"Do you see that razorback baby running over there?" he asked jocular-

ly. "Fire on him—quick! There's a reason for it."

The boy looked at him with sullen disbelief. Then, as if to prove that his aim was equal to an untried Yankee's, he raised his sawed-off gun and brought the squealing young thing to the ground.

"Walk over. I want to tell you something before we take it in. It's to be the Yuletide dish for Tamsie's pap—roasted, with an apple in its mouth. He can smell it even if he can't eat. Remember what day it is—the sixty-seventh anniversary of the Folks-Shepard feud. All shot off or died but Tamsie, her pap, and you. Know how we're going to end it? We're going to walk in there and, before God and man, Stewart Folks, you are going to take Tamsie for your wife, forever and ever! Then all the punch, and dances, and songs—"

The boy jerked away. His spaniellike eyes flashed perplexed sparks as if asking why he should be so hurt when his allegiance was firmly pledged.

But the stranger told the truth. Wisely, he did not say that he was going home for New Year's, a cured man, or mention the mirror's crashing. He knew that the lad would doubt his wisdom if he admitted that he, in turn, had sought the plateau land for aid.

"I want you to look ahead at the two ends of your forked road," he said briefly. "One fork if you go back to the valley, with Tamsie, and do the things we planned. The other if you stay with your people, and live in Folks' cabin, with Tamsie keeping the hearth swept clean. Don't you think, boy, that if you took the first you'd be like a wistful prisoner behind grim bars, a struggling lawyer just outside the gates of recognition, seeing the things you can't quite make or do—yet wanting, struggling, resisting the bars until all strength is gone, and only unrest and envy remain? Have you thought of Tamsie—I mean, when the honeymoon is over, and real living begins—have you thought of her, transplanted wild wood—and mountain women do not transplant—dying slowly, homesick, her heart in the cabin with her pap, her

woman's mind trying to learn the herculean tasks you set for her? Have you thought of that?"

The thatched head shook stubbornly.

"Did you ever sit down to reason out that progress has to come slowly, the winding-stair route? You've made big strides alongside of your pap, now haven't you?"

Youthful egotism nodded.

"You'd have laughed your head off, now wouldn't you, if some one had told you, knowing what you do now, that your pap could go into the valley and pass the examination of your school?"

"I reckon I ain't a fool," said the boy doggedly. "Pap couldn't even draw a mark for the sheriff when he come——"

"And yet," the stranger interrupted blandly, "you are trying to do just as impossible things. And I helped plan, I throw up my hands; I was dead wrong. Tamsie is right, Stewart; it is the realizing of limitations that makes the unacknowledged genius. Generations of strife precede actual upheaval and achievement. Look at your cabin—you can bring store fixings up from the valley, set an example for your own people, make Tamsie comfortable in her own land. You are to be the wedge, Stewart, the wedge that will make way for your children to the town schools, perhaps to city education and careers. Your people need you; there are enough of your sort struggling blindly to keep afloat, tossed like driftwood by unkindly superiors."

"What can I do for such as them?" The boy pointed one strong arm in despair at the McGuire cabin.

The stranger fanned the spark.

"Do? You can teach them everything you have learned below—that is task enough for one lifetime. Leave the heritage of learning for your children to pursue. The call is here for you."

"They don't like valley-educated people," he protested.

"Ah, but Tamsie will be with you. Every one on the plateau smiles when Tamsie knocks at their door. Tamsie's presence will open the way for your knowledge. She will be your guarantee.

What have they all said? 'Ras isn't going to give Tamsie to anybody that ain't pretty smart and well worth neighborin' with. If Stewart Folks goes back to the valley and takes Tamsie, better for him if he never comes round these parts again.' But you won't go. You'll stay here, as Tamsie wants you to, and do the work God meant——"

It was not only the stranger, newly awakened, speaking. It was his father, self-made millionaire, and his grandfather, honest workman, and his mother, helpful, loyal, and her mother—all these spoke to the mountain boy through the medium of this their descendant.

There was a long silence, during which the boy walked over toward the trail leading down to the valley. He gave a long sigh, and turned his head back to the stranger. Tamsie began calling, her voice sounding like a Christmas bell on the clear air. He picked up the young pig and threw it into his hunting basket. Then he reached out his hand to the stranger, who had followed him.

"You-all is right," he said softly. "I reckon the best way to get on in this world is to learn just enough to make you-all always want to know more—but to be so busy usin' what you-all has learned that there ain't no time to learn the rest!"

Together they passed into the cabin where Tamsie waited, a bit of mistletoe held over her curly, bewitching head.

It was full eight o'clock when the boarders at Mrs. McGuire's watched the old moonshiner prop himself up in bed to look with bewildered eyes at the platter containing a small, roasted pig, with an apple in its mouth. The platter had been placed at the foot of the bed by Stewart. Tamsie stood shyly by, glancing now and then at the stranger.

"Pap Shepard," said the boy awkwardly, "I reckon there ain't enough good eatin' to one of these hyar razor-backs to keep up the feud over."

"I reckon," the moonshiner answered, with dry humor, "that many a Folks and many a Shepard has laid bleedin'

in the brush, these last sixty-seven years, experiencin' the same feelin'. I reckon it's been plain cussedness."

In the presence of the stave-factory boys and Mrs. McGuire, Stewart took Tamsie "afore God and man on this Christmas Eve, to protect and cherish until God saw fit to separate."

The stranger was missing a few minutes later. In the general rejoicing, they did not notice his absence. He was walking up and down outside, telling himself with feverish impatience that it would be nearly three days before he could reach the loveliest girl, and tell her what she had asked to know.

From within came the strains of an old carol, distorted by mountain dialect:

"Hyar comes the lord of misrule,
(You-all listen, you-all listen.)
With yule log and flowing bowl,
(You-all listen, you-all listen.)
Now, good king——"

The stranger had a dozen generous

impulses. He would send Tamsie a piano; he would give the boy enough money for a decent modern house; he would bring them North on a wedding trip.

Then he stopped. Tamsie's laugh rang out above all the others. She was safe with her mountaineer, far safer than if she had gone with him into the valley to watch him struggle with the bundle of fagots when one was all that it was meant for him to break.

The stranger would be leaving in the morning; perhaps he might never come back, unless the loveliest girl wanted to come, too, and see where the shattered glass lay hidden. These people would speak of him as a mysterious memory, an unsolved enigma. It would be better for the boy never to see him; the memory of the valley might be stirred to unrest.

"No," said the stranger, "I won't spoil it!"



SONG FOR CHRISTMAS EVE

SOFT, soft, so sleeps the little stranger;
Croon, croon, in tender notes and mild!
Lovingly beside the lowly manger
Broods the Mother Mary o'er the Child.

Hush, hush, for far away lies danger!
See, see, how winsomely He smiled!
Yearningly beside the lowly manger
Bends the Mother Mary o'er the Child.

Time, time, thou art the ruthless ranger,
And yet we all must needs be reconciled,
For still for us beside the lowly manger
Leans the Mother Mary o'er the Child!

CLINTON SCOLLARD.



BEFORE the introduction of the automobile changed the face of Paris, and the face of the Parisian; when this hooting pandemonium of unregulated traffic—where to take a cab is to court a collision, and to cross a road is to be charged by a Bedlam on wheels—was still the “paradise of the saunterer,” there lodged on the fourth floor of a house off the Boulevard de Montparnasse an American, named George. He had, of course, another name, and meant it to be immortal. But as it remained obscure, “George” will do.

George, like multitudes of young Americans and Englishmen, went to Paris with the ambition of becoming a painter, and realized by slow and painful degrees that his brush wasn’t destined to support him. George, like multitudes again, resigned the courtship of art, unwillingly, for commerce in his native land.

His father was in the real-estate business in Chicago, and a position in the parental office was a horrible contrast to a position in the life class. State Street was a horrible contrast to “la Butte Sacrée.” For, in the intervals of spoiling canvases on the left bank, George had discovered Montmartre, and Montmartre was at that time peopled by Georges, all of whom meant to set the Seine on fire by their genius. Every day, through the window of the Chicago skyscraper, he could see them, with his mind’s eye, lounging picturesquely on the boulevards from which he had been torn. At the family dinner table, he

sped in fancy to a little restaurant in the Rue Lepic, where for twenty sous one dined so pleasantly and nearly believed that horse à la mode was what it called itself. While his sisters played duets in the elegant drawing-room, his memories reached the door of an artist’s cabaret, and he pushed it open, and—

There were many pipes inside, and there was much beer. A girl stood singing at the piano. Her voice was small, but the posse of shabby scribes and painters listened to her—she compelled them to listen by her earnestness and her face. It wasn’t a pretty face, but it portrayed the story that she sang. And in the story there was nothing novel, but there was reality. Some day, perhaps, she would be singing it for enormous salaries in London or New York; more than one singer or writer, now celebrated, had known what it meant to starve and hope here. When she finished, she sat down by a young man who boasted very long hair and no collar. In most assemblies he would have been conspicuous; in this one, there were plenty of men with no collars and such hair. He rolled cigarettes eternally, and the pile of little saucers before him indicated that he was sipping his seventh bock. A portrait painter, miserably clad, shuffled among the tables, soliciting work, willing to sketch any one for a few coppers. A man rose next; he was going to sing a ballad of his own composition—

But at this point the sisters’ duet concluded with a crash, and George was back in Chicago.

He said he had *mal de pays*—he was "homesick" for France.

So it came to pass that in his leisure hours, which were chiefly the hours when he ought to have been in bed and asleep, George did another thing that multitudes have done before him, and have done since. He wrote a book, in which all the discomforts of French life were depicted as delightfully humorous, and all the charms were magnified a millionfold. It was one of those books that only the fervor of youth in exile can accomplish, the kind of book that is published under the title of "The Truth About Paris," with a picture of Venus in a Doucet costume on the cover, as representative of artists' models looking for a job. Every year such works are exhibited in booksellers' windows in the Rue de Rivoli, and sad tourists who read them sigh: "I don't come across that sort of girl myself!"

In due course, copies of George's unveracious account were exhibited in the Rue de Rivoli, and vastly it uplifted him to imagine them there. Some of them were exhibited, briefly, in Chicago also, and he used to stand on the sidewalk admiring them as often as he could find an excuse for slipping out of the office. His father said—but, of course, he *would*!

George did not derive any money from literature, by reason of a rotten contract and small sales; but it wasn't for financial reasons that he had dabbled in authorship. It was sufficient reward to reread his favorite pages and look back into the scenes that they purported to describe. The volume was a guidebook to the enchanted past.

Then, one day, coming upon it by accident in the family bookcase, he exclaimed: "Oh, rats!" and threw it behind the handsomely bound classics on the top shelf that nobody ever touched. He had begun to take less interest in the enchanted past than in real estate.

It was at this stage that his father used to say:

"It's a good thing we didn't let the boy fool along with a paint brush, my dear—he's got a headpiece of his own. George is going to be a smart man!"

And George proceeded to justify the statement. So do we change! His heart turned back to paint brushes no longer. When Paris was mentioned in his hearing, it stirred no more emotion in him than when he heard of Coney Island. He had been promoted to a private room in the skyscraper. By and by he was taken into partnership. He could have made a trip to Europe now, and beheld Montmartre again in any annual vacation, but the longing to go was dead; he found space enough in America for a holiday. He turned thirty. His income continued to improve. He evinced a sound taste in investments. Lots of mothers in Chicago considered it was high time he married.

And then in the month of May, 1910, he went to London on business. And a man whom he wanted to see in connection with it happened to be in Paris. And, after an interval of fourteen years, George returned to the city of his youth.

The business matter was arranged in a hotel in the Place Vendôme, where he stayed. The opulence of the quarter evoked memories. But so sensible had he grown during the fourteen years that, although he had much spare time on his hands, it did not occur to the improved George to revisit quarters for which he used to pine. That is to say, it did not occur to him for three or four days.

He had come out of the Concerts Touche, and stood wondering whether he should walk or drive, and whether he wanted any supper. Some one in the hotel had told him that the best music in Paris that night was to be heard at the Touche, and he wished that he had asked somebody which, among the unfamiliar restaurants, was the best supper place for a man who hadn't put on a dress coat.

On a sudden he felt lonely and strange in the passing crowds. Lonely and strange in Paris! "Time works wonders!" said George. On reflection, he didn't want supper. As he strolled up the foreign Boulevard St. Denis, he realized that what he wanted was a glimpse of the Boulevard de Clichy,

where he had been so much at home. Monsieur Francis Touche was partly responsible for the sentiment; his cello had been inspired.

"Montmartre!" said George to a cabman.

There was a tremor in his pulses as he got out and looked about him. Briskly he crossed the road and bent to the right. In the moment the man's memory was as vivid as the boy's had been while his sisters played the piano; his impression was that he could have found a dozen bohemian doorways blindfold. He strode on, past glittering cafés and fantastic shows, for some distance—much farther than he had contemplated. Vaguely it appeared to him that the cafés had altered, and he was astonished that on his way he encountered never one of such picturesque figures as ought to be thronging the street. He hurried, bewildered, looking for doorways and inhabitants that had vanished, until coldly it dawned on him that he was approaching a dismal region that he had never seen before. It was much like a nightmare.

When another cab came into view, he said again: "To Montmartre!"

"*Vous-y-etes*," croaked the driver.

"Well, Place Pigalle, then!" said the pilgrim, more explicitly, and was borne back over the ground that he had covered.

He would have asked to be directed to the places that he sought, but he could not recall their names; indeed, it seemed to him that they had never been dignified by names—they had been "Montmartre," the backbone, and the spirit of it!

Walking more slowly now, he remarked curious signs upon the café windows. Many were inscribed with the words, "English spoken," others blazoned the foreign legend, "Afternoon Tea." At the entrance to some penny gaff, a tout shouted to him, "All right! Very sheep 'ere. You come in, sare?" A party of trippers, swaggering arm in arm, were chorusing in cockney a ditty of the London music halls. Quite as amazing, there arrived, in a square of restaurants that had been

dark till midnight and were now ablaze with light, a stream of men in evening dress and women gorgeously gowned. The bohemia of his boyhood revealed every human species but the bohemian!

Presently, perceiving a café that had an air of being humiliated by the comparisons that it provoked, George dropped into a chair and ordered something to drink. The little terrace had few patrons, but the next moment he beheld in his neighbor a melancholy old man, who was attractive by virtue of a floppy wide-awake, unkempt hair, and a straggling beard. He brooded behind a huge pipe, in front of an empty glass, and he looked like a blend of Tennyson in his photographs and a Latin Rip Van Winkle.

George recognized him as Opportunity.

"Pardon, monsieur," said George, taking off his hat, and receiving a courtly salutation with the wide-awake, "I am a stranger in the neighborhood, and I cannot find a single place that I am looking for. Would you have the extreme kindness to put me on my road?"

"You seek what addresses, monsieur?"

"Well, it is precisely that," George continued, in his rusty French, "that I don't know. The last time that I saw Montmartre, I was a good many years younger, and I can only say that I want to find the way to its bohemia."

The old gentleman regarded him with more attention. And then, pointing with a slow gesture to the heavens, replied:

"Monsieur, you will find sooner the way to Mars!"

"Really?" said George, disconcerted, and added: "Upon my word, I had begun to fear something of the kind!"

"Such information as I can supply, monsieur, is at your service. For example"—he caressed his beard—"I can direct you to American bars, and English dancing girls, and negro boxers. With such attractions as these the quarter abounds. But the poets have been chased away, scattered by the tourists and the prodigal. Of the na-

tives who raised Montmartre to fame, I can point but to one—I linger here alone!"

"I am indeed honored to meet you," said the pilgrim. "It's an extraordinary change!"

"It is more than that, monsieur; it is unparalleled. I have seen changes of many kinds! I have seen the express rush where the *diligence* used to lumber, and seen the automobile metamorphose Paris, and seen the *dirigible* herald the conquest of the air. But the most astounding change that I have ever seen is the transformation of Montmartre in fourteen years."

"And the saddest?"

"Well, I avow it! In the quarter where I once was a king, I am now an intruder. When I dare to peep into cabarets where I used to reign, I ask myself if I dream. I am dazzled by orchestras in red coats and dandies splashing champagne. The new waiters stare at me contemptuously: 'What sort of a fellow is this?' they say. Their predecessors scampered to bring my beer! Formerly a hundred sous there was the price of lavish hospitality—to-day it is too little for a tip."

By this time, it was a quarter to two, and George was extremely hungry. His proposal that they should sup found favor, and the survivor of the Grand Epoch proved so discursive a guest that his reminiscences brought them to half past five.

As his libations to the Muses had got into the old gentleman's legs, and it transpired that he dwelt at a considerable distance—no nearer, in fact, than on the summit of the hill—George was for putting him into a cab. The poet's dignity, however, forbade him to profit by the suggestion, and they therefore climbed the hill together. Here no cab was visible—in the tenderness of early morning, the heights of the Sacre Coeur still slept in peace—and ere he could return to his hotel it was necessary for George to descend whence he had come.

A few early workers were astir there now; the bakers had taken down their shutters, and the revelry was guttering

out. On the thresholds of the restaurants that had leaped to multi-colored brilliance at midnight, the festoons of electric bulbs looked sickly in the sunshine. To the pavements drifted the dregs of the clienteles, haggard and yawning. George paused to shudder at them; and it was at this moment that he witnessed the most astonishing sight that he had seen yet. For, past the wastrels and the wantons drooping to repose, there came, with aimless steps and virginal eyes, a girl, either English or American, whose freshness proclaimed her newly risen. And it was as if a lily had sprung blooming in a garbage pail.

Awakening to the sensation that she created, the girl quickened her pace. And he, perceiving that she was by no means safe from insult, instinctively followed her.

He followed discreetly, and no sooner did she believe herself to have escaped remark than her pace slackened. By the purposelessness of her gait, he began to suspect that she had nowhere to go.

Down the Rue Blanche she wandered, and now George had the satisfaction of proceeding in the direction of his hotel while continuing to play watchdog to the young lady. Just as he was questioning for how long he meant to sustain the rôle, however, a bend in the street hid her from his view, and when he overtook her it was to find that she was seated on one of the benches outside the Eglise de la Trinité. It was also to find that she was crying.

George halted, and went on—wavered, and went back. He felt more than a little cheap, but it appeared to him that he was up against a duty.

He said: "Excuse my speaking to you; but I'm an American, and I'm afraid you're in trouble?"

She started painfully. And then, after a glance of appraisal, replied with an obvious effort at composure:

"It's nothing, thank you."

Her head dismissed him. Again he hesitated, and again he risked a snub.

"If there's nothing the matter, why are you crying?"

The girl gulped, and said: "I am not crying."

This, of course, was so absurd that for a second he was dumb.

"Well, you aren't laughing very heartily! If I can be of any use—" Impatience got the upper hand. "Why don't you talk straight? You might have the gumption to see that I mean well."

His rebuke had effect. Honoring him with a further glance, she said gratefully:

"I see you mean well, but—"

"But you won't tell me what's the matter? Will you answer another question, then: Where are you going when you've finished with this bench?"

"I don't know," she stammered.

"What's the explanation—can't pay your board bill?" asked George.

She nodded.

"I'm expecting a remittance, but they wouldn't wait, at the pension, any longer; I've just had to vacate my room."

"You're American, aren't you?"

"Yes—Wisconsin."

"Been across long?"

"Three months; that's all. I'm a miniature painter. I came over to study. I guess I'd better have stayed at home! But I was always crazy to reach Paris."

"Paris is all right," he said. "But Montmartre isn't the healthiest quarter for you to take early-morning rambles, even under financial pressure."

Her blue eyes widened; she exclaimed: "You've followed me down!"

"I took the liberty. I had a presentiment that this conversation might be timely. In your place, I should not choose my next pension in Montmartre."

"It was Montmartre that I was crazy for," she explained. "I had a notion it would all be so beautiful there."

"Ah, so had I!" said George. "But it isn't! I've begun to wonder if it ever was—quite so beautiful as I thought!"

"I once picked up a secondhand book about it, and the author wrote as if it were a fairyland. I should think I've read that book a hundred times. He

pretended to have been an art student there, but somebody told me afterward he was a man in the real-estate business in Chicago. Still, I couldn't help believing in his book!"

After a considerable silence: "I am sorry," said George heavily, "that you couldn't help believing in his book. I am the more regretful because I fear that I am the 'man in the real-estate business.'"

The young lady rose and wished him a curt "good morning."

"Since you treasured his book, you may remember his name?" he protested. "Before you condemn me as a *farceur*, do me the justice to look at my card."

It was a trump card! She faced him, breathless.

"To return to our muttons," said George, some moments later, "let us go to breakfast and discuss finance! It's a beautiful morning for coffee and rolls—or perhaps you'd prefer chocolate?—and, at the same time, we can cast an eye over a newspaper for a promising *pension de famille*."

"Why, what do you mean?" she cried, retreating. "You don't imagine—"

"Not for an instant," he said. "I'm dead sure. Oh, I know I'm a stranger, but I'd be stranger still if I left an American girl with no better address than a seat under a dusty tree. I propose, as a first step, a little breakfast on the terrace of a café that Wisconsin would commend—and you are going there, if I have to carry you! By the bye, I don't know *your* name yet; to be conventional, suppose you introduce me to you."

Her name was Mamie Brett, and she preferred chocolate. Before the history of her life concluded, it was nine o'clock on a delicious day, and George hadn't seen his bed for twenty-four hours. But never had he felt sprightlier. By this time he had ceased to concern himself with the question of when he was likely to regain his hotel, and not even his ambition for a bath and a shave could persuade him to terminate the conversation.

"Why," he declared, "the 'way out' is as obvious as the Eiffel Tower! Your

Aunt Elizabeth's remittance may arrive by the next mail——"

"If she can spare the money!" put in the girl somberly.

"As I was saying! And all you have to do is to regard me as your Aunt Elizabeth in the meanwhile. So we'll drive to the Etoile Quarter and inspect some of the admirable pensions that seem to swarm there."

"I don't know what you must think of me!" she moaned. "I'll never be able to hold up my head again!"

"You're the most refractory niece I ever had," complained George.

And when the Etoile Quarter proved far too dear to meet her views, it was with no intolerance that he foresaw himself destined to spend the whole forenoon in her society.

"It's frightfully tedious for *you*!" she sighed, as they came down the eleventh staircase, humbled.

"On the contrary," demurred George, "I delight in exercise of a morning. I could go on ringing bells with you for hours!"

The advertisement columns of another journal revealed that cheaper accommodation was to be discovered in Neuilly; so they took the *Metropolitain* to the Porte Maillot, and pottered through the suburb's gates.

In Neuilly, they grew less sanguine than they had been in the train; but they lunched at a pastry cook's.

"That grand man, Perronet!" announced George, as they came back to a statue.

The girl faltered.

"I'm ashamed," she confessed. "What did he do?"

"I've no idea," said George, and went on: "Here's a street named after him—perhaps he founded pensions. Let's go and see!"

And in the Rue Perronet there actually was a pension at terms modest enough to suit her. A horrible little house, George thought it. However, she was adamant, and in the tiny salon, where the windows were hermetically sealed, he perforce took leave of her.

When he had made an arrangement for her belongings to be transferred, a

sultry afternoon was well matured. But by five o'clock he did, indeed, succeed in reaching his hotel. And when he awoke, in the dark, and lay sifting realities from dreams, one solid fact suddenly irradiated both the apartment and his mood: It would soon be his pleasing task to make polite inquiries at the horrible little house in Neuilly!

It shocked George to ascertain that she had neglected to see the peacocks in the *Jardin des Plantes*, and he prepared to remove that reproach from her record. She was unacquainted with various sights to which it was essential that she should be promptly introduced. For instance, though she had visited Versailles and worshiped in the *Trianon*, she had failed to find her way to its *Orangerie*, and he knew that, in May, the wonders of the *wistaria* were there. It was on the day that he called to take her to the *Orangerie* that her greeting was eloquent of news. Her Aunt Elizabeth's draft had come. There was an envelope awaiting him, bulky and jingling with the amount of his loan.

"If you only knew how grateful I am to you!" she said. "It's just hopeless for me to try for words. All my life I shall remember what you've done!"

He mumbled awkwardly: "So you're out of the soup now?"

"Yes. I am going back home. Aunt Elizabeth advises it, and I guess she's right. Oh, I've something to show you!" She exhibited a book to him. "This is it!"

The man stared, and laughed; he took it in his hands.

"I had forgotten what it was like!" He turned a page slowly, looking backward. "Fourteen years ago!" he murmured. "Why, you were a little girl then! And one day it was to lead you to Paris, was it?"

"Well, it may have had some influence," she smiled.

"I ought to explain that I didn't foresee you when I was writing it," said George, apologizing. "Were you conspicuously a nuisance for your age?"

"To know me was to idolize me," she said.

"Time alters us all. By the way,

have I proved a *very* chilling change from the author that captivated you?"

"Remnants of him linger."

"Concentrate upon the scraps! I'm feeling rather like the 'last rose of summer' just now. I think you may take the book away and bury it. I don't want to see it any more."

"Why, you wouldn't be that boy again, would you?" she cried, her voice smothering him.

"I have said: 'Young fool!' to the boy, with reason, on three pages," af-

firmed George. "But the boy has the last word—he says: 'Old fogey!' Do I impress *you* as relatively antique?"

"I think *you're* silly," she remonstrated, and her lips were trembling.

"I don't mind that at all, so long as you don't think I'm old. You see, just as long as I live, I'm going to miss being your aunt, if—unless—that's to say —

— Well, I want you to make it another relationship. I love you, Mamie!"

"Oh!" she quavered. "Do you—George?"



FIFTH AVENUE

VANITY FAIR, Vanity Fair,
Highroad of fashion and byroad of care;
Here can a soul shed its husk of the earth
In haunting and taunting soft voices o' mirth;
Here is the rhythm o' color and sound
To drown in its lethe the work-a-day round;
Smiling, beguiling, bright faces that pass
Like shimmering sun drifts that waken the grass.
Oh, where in the world is there more o' life's sweet
Than here on your thoroughfare, Light-o'-Heart Street?

Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair,
Brave road o' Mammon and grave road o' care;
Rich man and poor man and beggarman, thief,
Gay maid and playmaid and woman o' grief;
Flower lad, sour lad pampered and spoiled,
Blue-coated czar keeping traffic's gear oiled;
Your priest with a prayer and your imp with a curse
All thrown together for better or worse.

Vanity Fair, Vanity Fair,
Happy-go-lucky and devil-may-care;
Others may long for the green, luring hills,
The path o' the woods where a troubadour trills;
The daisy-blown way in the vale o' the bee,
The white bit o' ribbon with fringe in the sea;
But give me an afternoon sweet with life's song
And the laughing and chaffing and chattering throng.
Ah, here is the road o' all heaven roads best
When Peggy and I swing along with the rest.

GORDON JOHNSTONE.

AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT

BY
Constance Skinner



Oh, East is East and West is West,
And never the twain shall meet
Till earth and sky stand presently
At God's great Judgment Seat.

—*Kipling.*



ELL, Peace?"

Claude Raimond lighted a cigarette and seated himself near her.

"Well?" he said again presently. She had not looked at him yet, or spoken. He took out his watch and glanced at it. "Nearly going time."

Peace half drew herself, half slipped, to her feet with an easy, primitive movement, and stood erect. Raimond marked the signs of emotion in her face, where delicate flushes were giving place to the vivid, live pallor that was natural to her skin. He saw the almost imperceptible movement of her tall, strong frame; it was like the response of a young cedar to a wind in the upper air, unfelt by the lower growth. Her eyes, blue, wide, and clear, were radiant with wonder and deep with the yearning of surrender. Their glance went past him to the light. She crossed the room to the window. Her long chiffon-and-lace tea gown hung away uncomfortably from her swinging, flat-footed stride. It was as little fitted to depend from the high, square shoulders of Peace Perkins as to drape the Norfolk Island pine at her gate.

There was a trace of pique in Raimond's tones when he spoke again:

"I'd like to know what you're thinking about. It isn't *me*. You don't know I'm here!"

"Why do you say that?" she asked, after a pause, which was long enough to increase his vague irritation.

"Oh—I've noticed you before. Sometimes I wonder if you know when I've kissed you! Just when you ought to be thinking most of the man you love, you slip away from me and go to that window and look out. Why do you do that? Are you getting tired of me?"

She turned to him now, her eyes shadowed with reproach.

"Why, Claude! Tired! As if I could! You know it's for life." She spoke simply after the first note of hurt surprise. "Yer know I love yer more'n all the world; more'n life, for I'd die an' be happy dyin' if I could take any knock-out that was meant fer you. I love yer till everlastin'!"

"Well, that's better!" Then he added, with a light laugh: "But, I say, Peace, don't let it run off with your grammar. You're talking wild West again."

"I—I'm sorry," she faltered. "It seems I can't remember. I was born ter talk so, an' when I get ter feelin'—*feeling*—way down, I just talk the way it comes. Maybe I'm queer, too, like my talk. For there's times when it seems like I've given you all the love I can, and yet there's so much more in me I can't give; and, somehow, this room—and the world—seems too small. I guess that's what makes me come ter the window. I want ter look *out*—through the pines, and it seems like I'm lookin' beyond the hills, too, ter some place that's big enough and is mine. If 'twas up home, in British Columbia,

I'd want ter ride as far as I could see—and on."

"What made you love me so much. Peace? Answer in good English, if possible."

She smiled wistfully at him.

"It was the picture play I seen—saw—you in first—'The Prospector's Peril.' You certainly were great in that piece—a great genius," she added, recalling the word he had taught her. "You looked like my brother the day he started off to the headwaters of Peace River—and never was heard of no more. It's my godmother, Peace River, coz mamma was drowned in it when I was a baby. It's the worst river ever was, I guess, in spots. That was some one's kinder sad joke, namin' it 'Peace.' That old life and all the feeling of it come over me when I saw you walkin' inter that picture. I was back there—back in the Peace country."

"Well, seeing what it did to your family, I shouldn't think you'd love it so much," he laughed.

"It's nature—what you call my 'wild West,' making fun of me! It's dearer ter us, in a way, than family. It's a spell, and can't be reasoned out. That's how I feel about *you*—and it's a big thing ter me. My! I went every night that week they did 'The Prospector's Peril.' And when I read about you actin' for all the pictures out at Garvanza, then I wrote to you, coz I wanted a friend—I was so lonesome. And I was sure you was a real prospector, or how could you look like one, and carry your pack the way they do? I didn't know anything about actors and geniuses. You're the only actor and genius I've ever met up with. What's the name of that place where you'd oughter be actin'?"

"Broadway, my dear. Broadway, in little old New York. But money's the only thing that talks on Broadway. So I guess they'll go on starring boobs."

She looked at him wistfully.

"I wish we could be married, Claude. Then you wouldn't feel so bitter at life. 'Tain't good for you. Isn't it *hard* we can't marry?"

"Little girl, would you have me leave

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that helpless woman? She loves me, too, remember. What sort of a man would I be?"

He was gently reproachful.

"That's one reason why I love you so, Claude. You're square. That's what father taught me—ter be square. 'Square Scotty,' they called him. I'd never have let you say a word of love ter me if it hadn't been that your wife's no wife at all ter yer; and gives you that freedom. I wouldn't do that way ter a woman that was a real wife; it wouldn't be square. The way you act about her is jes' one more reason why I'd give you all I've got. I'd go with you, and take any chance ter do you service, and help you ter make everybody that lives in Broadway know what a genius you are. Because you're a square man, an' every word you ever said ter me was true and sincere."

Raimond contemplated her with amusement.

"You know," he said, "one of your charms for me is that you know so little. Here you are about twenty-seven, and a widow, too; yet you're a genuine ingénue. How did you ever get down here?"

Peace answered his light question seriously.

"I came for Rosie's sake. Rosie was my little sister. I guess I was about sixteen when father married Ann Black. She was Pete Black's daughter that had a claim close ter father's, about thirty miles. Ann wasn't much older'n me, maybe nineteen. Her baby was jes' walkin'. A fur trader had done her wrong. He left her an' never came back. He was all the way from New York. Pete was killed by a tree fallin' on him; and father married Ann. He always thought a lot of Ann, but he had a greater love for Rosie.

"Ann used ter tease him and say: 'If I didn't have my Rosie, yer'd never have took me for yer wife, Square Scotty!'

"And he'd laugh an' say: 'Well, lass, praise God fer Rosie!' Weren't it queer, he died under a tree, too, like Ann's father?"

"Rosie was the only *white* little baby

child in our parts. She was beautiful. You never saw such hair as Rosie's. It was more golden than gold; it was like autumn in the cottonwoods, I used ter say. And her eyes, they was jes' full of light. When I'd call her, how she'd come jumpin', and runnin', and lookin' with them big, shinin' eyes!

"We sold the claim when father was killed, and Ann, and Rosie, and me, we took our things, and our Indians, and dogs, and we made the long trip down country. It was about four months, I guess, when we got ter Hundred-an'-fifty-mile House on the old Cariboo Road, where Ann's brother was. We'd planned ter give Rosie schoolin', coz nothing was too good fer her. Ann was ter live with her brother, and take care of Rosie, and I was goin' farther down country and get work."

"Oh, so that's how you came here."

Raimond, lolling in the huge, cushioned chair, was enjoying his cigarette, and giving a lazy ear to her tale.

"No. Bill Perkins was at Hundred-an'-fifty, sellin' his liquor. He took ter me, but I wouldn't have nothing ter say ter him, coz he didn't mean right. He didn't mean ter stick. That's what got him so set on me. He was a rich man. In a couple of days he come and says: 'I'll marry you.' And I'd been thinkin'—of Rosie. And so I made a bargain with him, all square an' above-board. He was ter give the money for Rosie, and I married him—"

Her gaze drifted unconsciously to the window again. It seemed to go out, searching beyond the hills. Presently she continued:

"One day I come in from sendin' a little dress and a ring—and there was a letter from Ann; it was the only letter she ever wrote me. It jes' said: 'Dear Peace, Rosie died. She was sick a week. The doll got here the day we buried her, so you needn't trouble ter send nothing more now.'

"Queer, weren't it?—all I could think of was Rosie's eyes shinin'. And there was me married ter Bill Perkins jes' six months. It was a joke, but the kind yer don't laugh at. He lived five years more—bad years, they was, and nothin'

ter look ahead for, ter make up for the sufferin'."

"Gosh, what a picture play that story would make! Well, dearie, I must be on my way."

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"You're a good bit too tall, Peace. But outside of that, you certainly are a beautiful woman; and that means something when I say it, for I've got taste."

She followed him to the door for a last caress. The tender, wistful smile touched her face again as she won his promise "at least to think about Broadway." His tone, however, was peevish, almost resentful.

"Oh," he shrugged, "I'll *think* about it, yes. But what I ask myself is why should I give up my comfort and a good contract with the Human View Moving-picture Concern just to go and make a fight on Broadway for something the public is not educated up to. You're a woman, Peace, and so you don't understand these things. A man must shape his own life. I might do a tour of one-nights where my pictures have played. Well—I'll think it over. Good-by, dearie. You may see me again later—if you're good."

He ran down the steps.

Peace walked slowly through the hall to the sun room at the back of the house. It looked on a patio where a fountain played among gayly colored flowers and palms. There were Norfolk pines by the back wall, too, and, far beyond, the deep-blue hills shot with bronze and red, with silver-green lines of olive groves at their base. Above the blue hills and the tremulous heat mist, the white peak of San Antonio, like an island of light, hung high in the cobalt sky. Peace sank into a low chair and sat there, looking out. Her long figure was relaxed and very still, her strong hands, heavily burdened with diamond rings, lay limply on her knees.

Peace Perkins was twenty-seven years of age, but toward all little and complex things she had the mind of a child. Her seven years in Los Angeles had not changed her in this regard.

Five of them had been sorrowful years, sordidly, evilly sorrowful years, with Bill Perkins, now demised. Peace had taken the sorrow, but her heart had retreated from the evil, and had escaped comprehension of the sordidness.

"She had learned nothing of the world, not even its first lesson—to be suspicious, to doubt. She knew life, but not the world. She had lived in the great spaces, been shaped by them; she had sounded the depths of tragedy, of patient hope, of the joy of service in the hour of a stranger's great need, or a kinsman's; she had known the silent things that make all men kin in the vast, and the woman's woe of long, brave waiting for the return of the men who would never come, and of whose end no *word* would ever come. Life, to Peace, had the epic rhyme. There was no place in its mighty sweep for subtle analyses and dissections.

"Missy Perky, Missy Perky!"

"What's the matter, Yoy?"

Peace answered her Mongolian servant without turning her eyes in his direction.

"Missy come see you."

A tall woman of rather ample build stood in the doorway. She wore a white linen dress, cut low at the throat, and a panama hat with a blue scarf around the crown. She carried a linen parasol. A large hand bag to match hung from her wrist; it was embroidered in delft blue silk.

"Good day," Peace said, without rising. "It's hot for visiting. Please to come in and sit down."

"I came here on business that won't wait. So I followed your chink right up."

The woman's tones were deep and somewhat coarse. She still stood just within the doorway. Ah Yoy had disappeared down the balcony steps. Peace looked puzzled.

"I don't think I know you, but won't you sit down?"

She spoke slowly, sorting her English with great care.

The visitor threw back her heavy veil. "Maybe you know me now!"

Peace saw a woman who was, perhaps, half a dozen years older than herself, although the hard lines in her countenance might have been due to bitter living, rather than years, for hatred tinged the glitter of her black eyes. A coil of thick, brown hair showed beneath her veil and hat brim. Peace found the stranger's features vaguely reminiscent. Her own face softened into a happy, childlike smile, and a little flush of joyous excitement rose in her white cheeks. She went toward the woman with hands outstretched shyly.

"Why—yes! Yes, I know you! You're the lady in the picture plays. Oh!" The last syllable was a sigh of pleasure. "I guess I know, too, who asked you to come to see me. Ain't it wonderful?"

For an instant the ugly gleam in the visitor's eyes wavered, and something like fear showed there. It was only momentary, but in that moment Peace had taken her heavy bag from her, and was leading her to the chair opposite her own. She laid the bag on the table between them, and resumed her seat.

"You acted the Indian girl that saves his life all the time in 'The Prospector's Peril.' Ain't it wonderful?"

The red flamed again in the woman's face. She broke out passionately:

"*You're* acting! You're playing innocent. You know who I am. What are you trying to make me believe? That he never told you, but was all to blame?"

Her rage choked her.

"Why—why—ma'am! I'm awful sorry my not knowin' you angered you." In her trepidation, Peace's English deserted her again. "But, honest, at first—I only jes' now recognized you from the pictures—an' he never even told me you was comin' ter see me. Please don't get mad at me," she hurried on. "I'd like, now I've met up with you, fer us ter be friends, coz I'm so awful lonesome here. That's why he asked you ter come here, I guess. 'Tain't often he thinks of things fer me that way. But that's coz he's got his career on his mind. I guess you understand that part of it better'n I do."

The visitor's lips even were like chalk. Her voice was metallic, forced. She said:

"I'm Claude Raimond's wife."

There was a silence in which the two women stared at each other. Their gaze met, steady and unflinching. Peace was always pale, but something had gone from her living whiteness, as the light from a crystal. When she spoke, her tones held a trace of reproof, otherwise they were as gentle and almost as calm as usual.

"You *can't* be his—wife. Coz he's told me all about *her*. You're the picture lady, that's all. He don't mix in with the other picture actors, coz he's so different; so he ain't hardly had any conversation with you, but he talked nice about you—when I asked him. So why do you come here an' lie about him?"

The woman was 'osening the string of her hand bag with nervous fingers. The cords in her thick, brown-tinted throat stood out, swelling till she could hardly speak.

"It's you that's lying! I'm his wife. How could you help knowing? Who'd tell you different?" she challenged. "You went after my husband and followed him up, and pestered him just like all your sort of women go after actors. And you thought I wouldn't find out, or, if I did, I'd just bear it—break my heart and keep quiet. But I'm not that kind."

She whipped a revolver out of the delft-embroidered, white bag. The movement of her arm was swift and feline, as she leaned across the little bamboo table that stood between them, and pointed the heavy Colt's at the slender, white breast arching the thin lace of Peace's elaborate and unbecoming gown.

"I haven't used one of these, save for acting, since I left Arizona. That's where I learned to use it—on rattlers. The way we deal with any treacherous, stealing, snake creature in Arizona is to kill it. I'm not jealous, though you're younger and prettier than me, and I'm not shooting you because my husband's

let you make a fool of him. I'm going to kill you because you're a thieving, lying snake woman. You're not fit to live in God's sunshine. You're not *square*!"

Her eyes still burned, but the hope that had lit their hatred with a fierce, primitive splendor was quenched. They were sullen and desperate. Her tone, her attitude, the expression of her tense face and body, all were a passionate prayer to Peace Perkins to die silently like a guilty thing, and let Claude Raimond's wife keep her faith in her husband—that he had sinned in an errant man's way, but had not lied, betrayed. She was no longer the proud avenger, secure in her right; she was one who battled for her right to avenge. Under the code that had brought her there triumphantly to slay the snake that had struck at her happiness—the code of the self-lawed West, which might be put into the inelegant and ungrammatical phrase, "Live *square* or die *quick*"—she was forced to give the other woman the chance to clear herself of the sin whose wage was death.

"It ain't a safe shing you're sayin' ter me—that *I ain't square*!"

A slow, deep flush rose through the white mask of Peace Perkins' face; her eyes seemed to grow lighter by contrast, their ingenuous roundness narrowed dangerously. Her voice, naturally so timid and leisurely, came between her teeth in hard and breathy tones. Her hands clenched, and the big diamonds pierced her knuckles; she leaned forward till her breast touched the muzzle of the revolver; she seemed unconscious of the contact.

"Yer dassent say that ter me. No woman nor man dare tell me *I ain't square*! I don't care nothin' for yer gun! If what you said of me was true—I'd oughter be shot. And if the rest you said is true—about *him*—then I'd want ter be. If you're his wife—why—then he's dealt us both crooked. And he—he—ain't a square man. Oh—oh—God—him that looked so true!" The hard tension of her anger broke, but not into tears; she only shrank a little, weakened, and dulled. "If *he's* crooked,

then what do I care for yer gun, that can't do nothing but kill me."

The wife lowered her weapon helplessly.

"What did he tell you—about me?" she asked at length. Before Peace could answer, she added: "He told you we weren't close to each other any more, eh?"

"Yes, that's what he told me." Peace was surprised. "How did you guess?"

The other woman's lip curled bitterly.

"It's what a man always says—when the woman he wants is square. I guess there's no use in me trying any longer to believe he wouldn't do that way," she continued lifelessly. "This had to come. I've been through a lot with Sam, but he's clever, and he's always kept me half fooled. But this time I knew there was something wrong, something different. And I couldn't stand it—when I've been through so much for him, and the heavy end always coming on me. A man's a natural flirt, as any woman knows. But when it came to something permanent—I couldn't stand it, that's all. I said if a woman's gone after my man till she's got him, I'll kill her like I would a snake. So I watched Sam; and that's how I found out it was you."

"Who are you callin' 'Sam'?"

A faint hope tinged the question.

"Claude Raimond's just his stage name. His own name's not good on a program. I could have got over almost anything but this. I could have hated him for flirting, and for not being constant, and yet loved him, too; but how can you love a liar and a cheat, once it's been proved to you? What's there to love?"

There was silence for a while. When the British Columbian woman spoke it was in answer to her own thought, rather than to the question of the other.

"I guess I oughtn't never ter have left Peace River. I wasn't fit for a country where there's no way of tellin' a crooked man from a real one. We don't shoot men where I come from. 'Tain't our habit. But a crooked man can't live up in the Peace country, coz the word is passed, and nobody'll have any dealin's at all with him. So he has ter get

out or die. And that kind of man hasn't got the fight and the sand in him like what a square man's got, so he jes' hikes. And we pass him downriver and out. So I jes' go on taking it for granted that, if a man's allowed ter live any place, it's a sign he's square. I s'pose they couldn't make bad men hike here in these towns like they do up with us."

"There'd be a perpetual procession across continent, like Labor Day," grimly. "They used to stake their last six-foot claim mighty quick in Arizona. I met *him* in Tucson, getting well from pneumonia. He took my heart, he was so handsome and talked so fine. He always has that way of talking—it's romantic; it satisfies a woman. That's how it's been with me. He certainly reads his lines well," she added, with bitter humor.

The dangerous look crept back into her face.

"I couldn't stand this affair. It stirred me up. I've been through everything with him, knocking round the country, living in bare rooms—years of that—and heartaches—and bearing his child, the little weak thing that couldn't live because our life was too rough. I couldn't tend to it right." She broke suddenly into hard sobbing. "And now—now, when I've just got that hope again, with a fair chance—" Her weeping stopped her words for a while.

"I ought to hate you and want to kill you, like I did when I came here, because you've taken him from me; he loves *you*, I guess. But I can't hate you; because you never wronged me on purpose. But *he* did. He's got no right to live. Oh!" she moaned; "it's *him* I hate. It's *him* I want to kill. Oh, God—it's *him*!"

Peace moved slowly till she stood near to the wife. Her eyes had a stricken look as they glanced over the other woman's form with its presageful outlines. Her hands reached out to her, then fell to her sides again. The wife's face was hidden in her arms.

"You oughtn't ter talk that way—specially now," Peace said gently. "Even if he does love me, I couldn't

have anything ter do with him on account of him bein' the kind he is. It's downriver for him now. I pass him on." Pain weary from her inability to comprehend, she added dully: "He knew I trusted his every word and look."

Her eyes were tearless. They appeared to have receded an' grown darker by reason of the shadows that had come beneath them.

Peace did not hear Raimond's step on the velvet pile of her hall floor. She was standing by the table, with her back to the door. Her tall frame, in its floating robe, screened her visitor, whose head was still bent in her hands. Raimond came up lightly behind her.

"Well, dearie, I've been thinking over your little wild-cat scheme—"

He put his arm around her and leaned over her shoulder, appreciating as always the large, white diamonds in her ears. He looked down into the livid face and delirious eyes of the Arizona woman. Shock and the instinct of self-preservation, inherent in the flesh, made him drop back. Peace, who had gone cold and numb under his touch, acted mechanically. She caught the lifted weapon in her strong, beringed hands, and deflected the shot from the man. The ball cut off the top of a young palm, glanced through the open window, and plowed a small furrow in the path of the patio.

"You mustn't do that!" she said emphatically, and took the revolver. "Certain he's wronged you. But you've got more than him to think of. And it's best ter have fergiveness in yer heart when there's a little child lyin' under it, feelin' every way it beats—and not be killin' the father of it."

"This is—is—certainly—a surprise," Raimond stammered huskily. He was only slightly relieved when Peace laid the weapon on a flower stand at the other end of the sun room. "I—er—I had no idea—"

That remark concluded his inspiration until the silence, under his wife's glittering gaze, drove him for refuge to speech.

"I—I wouldn't have let you be sub-

jected to such a scene, Clara—if I'd known in time—not for worlds." The sound of his own voice in fluent phase once more gave him courage. "Of course, I know this must look badly to you, but if you understood it you'd see that you have no reason whatever to—er—lose control of yourself as you did—er—when I entered in that careless way. Surely you know too much to take a serious view of such things? You're a woman of the world. Why, you're the only woman on earth that means a thing to me! You know that!"

Her eyes still burned at him strangely; she made no answer. Peace Perkins laid her large hand, flashing with its dozen diamond rings, on his arm, and turned him to her with the strength of a man. There was no anger in her blue eyes; even grief had given way to amazed interrogation.

"That's what you say to her," she said. "Now—what about *me*? Yer told me things that wasn't true."

He saw his wife watching him relentlessly. A pride swelled in him because of her jealousy. It was the greater and more palatable for the touch of those diamonds on the other woman's hands. Ill chance had forced him to lose his giver of gifts, but he meant to lose her with honors. He looked at Peace, mask off. It was all in his face—the close bargainer's scorn for the liberal bestower; the venomous contempt of the son of craft and cowardice for the soul that had bravely dared to give a whole trust, and to stake itself upon that trust; and something lower still—the desire to degrade the woman who had too freely loved him, to grind her under his heel and cast her out, like Hagar from the tent.

"Why—I told you what every married man tells a woman he's flirting with, if she insists on it!" he said nonchalantly. "I'm sorry this thing came up this way—it's embarrassing for me, too. But I don't think you can complain. If a woman's principles don't protect her, she can't blame a man for playing his game. I'm sorry you're hurt, but—well, I kind of hate to say this, though it's the truth. A man just can't

think much of a woman who *gives* herself away."

His air, his shrug, his faint, deprecating smile, told her more than his words—which were scarcely intelligible to her because she had never encountered the point of view before.

"You despise me!" she whispered blankly, drawing back from him. "You despise me—an' it's for lovin' you! Did you always know what sort of a man you was, that you despised me for lovin' you? Why shouldn't I give you everything when I loved you an' believed in you? You told me we couldn't be married coz you was married ter a woman who wasn't anything ter you. Now you tell me, and her, too, that it was nothing at all you did when you told that lie ter me! You don't know what the word 'square' means, do you? But that's *all* I know.

"When Rosie's mother went with Square Scotty, d'yer think *he* despised her? Sometimes it's two an' three years, an' not a missionary comes through the country. But the women go with their men, and take the burden an' serve them and bear their little children, and are their true wives. And it's for life, like any marriage.

"It's all holy if you're square and true. And that's what I was to you. And you lied ter me and mocked, and took me when you had no right. And now you dare ter say I've got no self-respect! *You*—you—that's lied and lied, and made me do dirt ter a woman that's a true wife, and trusted and loved yer! Respect! Your respect wouldn't be worth anything coz you ain't *square*! You don't understand anything that's true!"

They stood so, regarding one another; the young woman from a primitive, unpeopled wilderness of the New World, strong, self-lawed, with the blood and the code of pioneers in her veins—truth, service, courage, or, as they call it, "squareness," and "helping along," and "grit"; and the man, with four thousand years of Oriental standards, and the merely fleshly ideal of purity in woman, behind the sneer and the dis-

honor he thrust at her. They stared into each other's eyes, strangers.

"We're going now." It was the woman from Arizona who spoke. "I wish I could have gone on being fooled. But I've been waked up, and I can't pretend. Sam, you've killed all the love I had for you. I'd be happier if I never had to see you again." She rose and gathered up her bag and parasol. "She and I understand each other—because we've got the same viewpoints. I guess that's why you've always hated the West, because you've got no loyalty or squareness about you. You belong with your own people, back there where they think a man all right that lies to women."

"Why—Clara! You—"

"Be quiet and listen to me, for I'm never going to talk about this again. I'd prefer to leave you. But I've given you all my youth and my labor, and I'm tired now; and I mean that you shall take care of me and of the child that's coming. But I'll never willingly touch you again—no, not even with my finger tips. I could have forgiven your flirting, but I was raised to despise a liar, and to kill a traitor. She stopped my killing you like a snake. That's over, too, for you're a harmless snake to me now. The next time you tell that old story to a woman it will be true." She turned to Peace. "Good-by. We could have been friends, you and me. I don't bear you any grudge."

"I am glad of that," Peace answered. "But, oh, Clara, what's he made of me that believed him? There's been unclean hands on me. What am I goin' ter do about *that*?"

The man made no attempt to speak. He was silenced. He felt something like fear in his failure to comprehend the two Western amazons who stood close to each other, but not touching, even in a handshake; the two strange women who had a code that they held to be greater than respectability and virtue, and that was too unfleshly for jealousy. These women were not jealous of each other on his account; he realized that fact now, vaguely. They were friends, kin.

It was not a pleasant experience for him, the modern son of a decadent East, with its polygamous philosophy, and belittlement of woman, thus to be thrust out of the shelter of old subtleties to the mercy of the elements. In the undesired conflict with those elements, he and his standards had been stripped and discarded by the creative forces in primitive woman, the burden-bearer, girding herself for conscious motherhood of an intrepid new race. Raimond was glad to obey a sign from his wife, and go.

Presently Peace saw them walking along the street behind her house toward the town. Her tall body swayed, bending and weakened, but too proud, or too convinced of its complete loneliness and detachment, to reach out for support. She put her hand to her own hips, and so steadied herself.

"If I could go back," she muttered.

"But I can't never go back ter Peace country. It wouldn't be the same."

She became aware of dampness where her palm pressed her side. A small, red stain was showing in the pink silk of her loose gown. The ball meant for the man had grazed her thigh when she had wrested the weapon from his wife. Mechanically she pushed her handkerchief under the stain. She moved slowly between the potted palms, close to the glass. The shadow of a deep, uncomprehended woe was in her eyes; their radiance had died. They looked forth unseeing across the patio and through the pines to the blue foothills and the light-crowned mountain, and beyond—dumbly seeking—into the unseen, infinite earth heart of God's wild places, where the primal code of truth is tableted, and the judgment seat is set up from the beginning.



THE CHRISTMASTIDE

NOW riseth high the lovely Christmastide—
A tide of joy, and peace, and sweet good will.
Upon its fullness may we ever ride,
And in its ebb find Love's abundance still!

Upon Life's shores it casts its bounty fair,
The flotsam and the jetsam of the soul—
Rich gifts of Sympathy it putteth there,
And deeds of Helpfulness for them in dole.

Remembrances in Hope to ease our fear;
Rare legacies in Kindness and Content—
A tide from God's own heart of ringing Cheer
With Mercy, Love, and Joyousness, all blent!

JOHN KENDRICK BANGS.

A Christmas Theme in Rococo EGERTON CASTLE



THE short days of the year have set in. This is the time when lazy musing by lamplight or fireglow, with, perhaps, a cup—"cup" is a good, old-fashioned, and noncommittal word—with a cup, I say, of something fragrant and steaming at one's elbow, is a seasonal joy.

To-night, in this cozy winter's mood, I am suddenly minded of the Christmas contribution I promised that confounded editor. And, gadso, it is much belated, and there is no time to work up something funny—at least consciously funny! Besides, I am in a comfortable, dreamy mood; merely reminiscent. The sails of my reverie are set lazily for the shores of old romance.

I drift. I land; and there I wander through the underwoods of memories that still cluster round a tale worked out long ago, chapters that remained unwritten—glimpses of possible dramas, such as the wayfarer, threading his way in a still unknown country, may catch on the road between the pillars of some ancient gateway where he lingers to ponder a moment or two, then tramps on and forgets it like a dream.

And between two puffs of my brown meerschaum, I suddenly recognize a little decayed *residenz*. Lauterbach, I believe it was. A very nest for romance! Alas! Once on a time German land was romantic, but well, well! I see again the coquettish little provincial pal-

ace, aiming at Frenchified lightness and elegance, amid its formal gardens, its gray terraces overlooking the park, and by its flank, standing respectfully apart, the steady, cozy, old town under the pointed roofs.

Just now, as I wander back to Lauterbach, tall, brown roofs of town, gaunt, bare trees of park, balustrades of palace terraces, all are mantled with December snow. From the town belfry the bell tolls eleven of the night. The watchman's wail proclaims a frosty sky and a full moon. The good town, under its two thousand or so nightcaps, is respectfully asleep amid its straw or feather beds.

The palace windows, however, I perceive, glow in amber against the blue of the night; among the high-born rulers of Lauterbach—this small patch on the complicated old Germanic map—there is banqueting, dancing, and other revelry. For is not Christina-Olivia-Elizabeth-Augusta, of Lauterbach and Heidenbrücken, to be wedded on the morrow to her saturnine cousin, the Margrave of Drachenberg—the mighty Nimrod? And if there be no love in the match, at least there will be a noble union of the mountain forests in the swart margravate with the fat champaigns of the "duodecimo" principality. The consequent armorial achievement will admirably blend their tincts and charges, and the combined array of crests will be a sight to rejoice heraldic eyes.

So, within well-closed doors—for the frost is biting—there are noble celebrations at the palace—liquid and boisterous among retainers, pompous and musical among the quality.

In the salon, the Margrave of Drachenberg, handsome in his tall bearing, for all his full-blooded and black-avised countenance, is sinistly affable with the old prince of Lauterbach. But, up in her retired apartment of Pompadour rose, where the balconied windows open upon the calm dignity of the park, the little princess—who has just fled, pretexting a megrim, from the smiles and the odious congratulations—stands by the casement, lifting a corner of the curtain, and peering out, an anguished frown on her young face. Under the powdered curls, her forehead is burning with rushing thought. Her hands are ice, I know, yet her pulses beat the wild tattoo of suspense.

Trotting in and out of the adjacent bedchamber, Silvie, the trusted abigail—a crafty and clear-headed piece, this, as indeed beseems a soubrette in troublous times—piles up in a corner an array of garments that, at the time of night, might well appear singular to an intruder. There are heavy winter cloaks, furred boots, a velvet traveling bag, quilted capotes, what not? And, as I live! A length of rope ladder, slender, but fit to support an absconding princess with the sturdiest lover without as much as a crack of its strands.

The fussy little china clock strikes the eleven strokes—inaccurate French *pendule*, a full minute behind the trusty belfry bell in yonder sleeping town!

“Silvie—Silvie! Past the hour, and no sign of the signal!”

But the soubrette, without stopping in her task, is soothing:

“Bah! Highness must surely allow the young milor a few moments law! It is a long way to the sea—a thousand things may retard—”

“Silvie, if he should fail me! If I am not to leave the palace with him to-night—I die! Ah, yes, Silvie, sooner than to-morrow’s marriage—”

“Dear highness, it will never take place,” affirms Silvie.

She casts a look into the little silver kettle wherein, amid the warm wood ash of the hearth, her mistress’ nightly posset awaits the moment of frothy outpouring into the Dresden cup.

“Nay—Silvie, if we do not escape to-night, it *is* marriage—or living death in the Falkenhaus! Oh, my father is inflexible! That was the fate of Mary of Mollnitz, of Ottilia of Anspach. It will be mine. He comes not. He comes not. Something has happened to him! Ah, my cousin of Drachenberg had his most evil, cruel look to-night. I feel he suspects something, and when he suspects— Hark!”

“Yes—if the Herr Margrave,” cries Abigail bravely, “only suspects, he is too late. For milor is come!”

And, indeed, as she spoke, there rose, through the frosty air without, a shrill, soft, undulating sound, the like of which, I trow, was never heard before in Lauterbach; for I can recognize a bar—only one, but unmistakable—on an English boatswain’s pipe. In truth, the ardent secret lover of this *Princesse Lointaine*, the venturesome young English lord, last summer’s guest at the *residenz*, has brought his well-laid scheme to issue!

Yet stay! There’s miching malicho in the palace to-night! There always is wherever passes the Margrave of Drachenberg. A single knock is heard on the panel, loud and menacing in the silence of the retired wing. The two women’s hearts give a leap. Silvie bounds up to the door. A gesture from the princess—dainty finger tapping her lip—implores caution and patience from the trespasser in the snow; and, as she drops the curtain once more, she sees her abigail stepping backward into the room, vainly protesting, driven by the masterful advance of the margrave himself.

He halts at last in the middle of the room, and bows sarcastically, looking with his merciless smile from one terrified woman to the other.

“My beloved cousin”—his words grate like a snarl—“I have bethought myself, before leaving your roof, as behooves the bridegroom on the eve of his

felicity, of inquiring about your state—of inquiring in person, since you left the salons without vouchsafing a word to your adorer. Have you forgotten, *ever liebden*, the good old custom of our race—the drinking of the 'happy wine,' on the last night of your maidenhood, with your betrothed, and the breaking of the glasses before he departs?"

She has made a mighty resolve, for her thoughts have run fast while he spoke.

"Happy wine!" she cries, with a sudden gayety. "Faugh for the hot, spicy stuff! Will not, my bridegroom, will not my own posset do as well—and better—since it is in my own room?"

He fixes her, at first, with surprise—never before has she had a word of laughter for him—then with red-eyed admiration, as she darts into the inner bower, to return almost at once, holding a covered cup of rose-red eggshell ware.

"And will not," she pursues, "the breaking of Sèvres do as well as glass, since it is my own cherished *tasse*?"

With fair hands she now half fills it with the frothing brew; then, pouring the remainder into another cup, pledges him and drinks.

Mockingly complacent, he tosses the draft. The cup drops from his hand, and is shivered at her foot. But it is not a pledge. His arms are thrown forward as if seeking support. He reels and sinks on the sofa, where he remains crouching, speechless, staring in furious bewilderment, but unable to stir. Milor's scheme, it seems, has foreseen all possibilities; the little phial, destined to meet extreme emergencies, has done its work. Here, for one full round of the clock, will be slumber and oblivion.

And now, feverishly—the very seconds are precious—for the last preparations! Cloaks are donned. Candles are blown out. The window is thrown open, letting in the soft light of the moon, the brave iciness of the night air.

The man of the hour has leaped in. Not a word, but a silent embrace, worth years of the man's life—or the maid's! Strong arms lift the priceless burden

down the ladder. Then flight across the noiseless snow! Flight of three: bold lover and his princess, guided by nimble-witted soubrette, key in hand, toward the forgotten ivy-grown door in a distant corner of the park. (The lock was tried and lavishly oiled yesterday.) The sleigh of the hasty English visitor waits in the lane; the sleigh bells for the nonce have been removed. Indeed, milor has thought of everything.

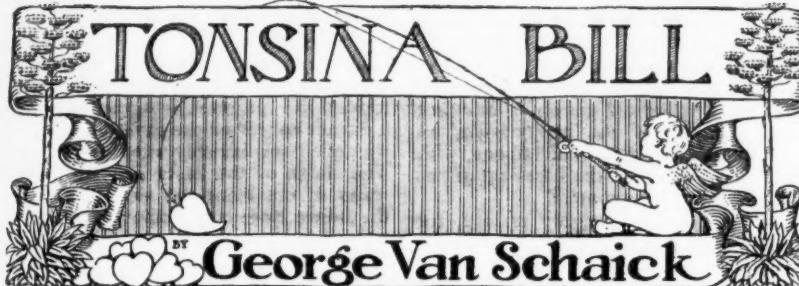
And as they at last glide away, to no more sound than soft hoof thuds on snow, the twelve notes of midnight begin to fall sedately from the belfry, far behind, over the white-shrouded land. Then, all of a sudden, nearer, from the courtyard of the still-awake palace, break out the deep voices of the margrave's hunting horns—six of his henchmen giving out the ancestral flourish of Drachenberg—wildly melodious, fiercely arrogant, soaring—to proclaim the first hour of what was to be the princely wedding day!

To this farewell the sleigh draws swiftly away, carrying a happy burden of kisses, vows of joy present, and of joys to come, a little fear still, perhaps, but a wealth of high-hearted hopes. And it is *hey for Hanover*—Hanover and safety from capture! And on, on, till Emden, where the yacht awaits.

And as for the arrival of the pair at the noble, peaceful, ancestral English home; the gateway between the crested pillars; the avenue of elms, at the end of which we just catch a peep of the stately Jacobean mansion—

"Stop!" an imperious voice cries warningly, and then seems to fall, whispering with an odd kind of hiss: "Come, man, this is an open-eyed dream, born of the sheen on that engaging Georgian silver punch ladle, and of the fumes of your Arcadian mixture. To work! The devil is waiting!"

It is only the explosion of a woody knot, and the fizzling of a jet of flame from the log on the hearth. To work, then. No more musings. But how in the name of conscience I am to write this within the four pages allotted by the editor, is more than I can tell.



TONSINA BILL

BY George Van Schaick

MACPHERSON'S LANDING had been a wreck since the mill had gone up in flames. But now it was emerging from its ashes. The big, new boiler had been installed, and there was a rumor that sawyers, cutters, loggers, sorters, and other operatives would soon be needed. The boarding-house roof, of galvanized iron, was still being repaired, and Campbell, who kept the general store, had contributed to the hopefulness of the population by repainting his sign. The Indians who lived down by the water's edge were the only indifferent ones, being aware that a new mill would have no effect on the price of fur.

The male white inhabitants were issuing from their houses, yawning and stretching their arms. Collars of flannel shirts were loosened and elbows bared. Then, with much splashing, hirsute faces and brawny arms were washed in the tin basins on the bench outside the door.

Presently came the whistle of the daily eastbound train, whereat the purified faces looked up. Those within the purview of the railway platform noted the arrival of a wide-shouldered man, much bearded, who grasped an oversized valise bound with much strong cord.

The newcomer looked about him, and, seeing Campbell's newly furbished sign, took the few necessary steps, and entered the store.

"Fine morning, pardner," he announced. "How about some plug?"

"Lashings of it, all new arrived and fresh," responded Campbell pleasantly. "Here's Pride of the Camp, and there's Lumberman's Joy."

A five-dollar bill tendered in payment subjected the customer to suspicion, since it necessitated the opening of the safe to make change. But as the man stood at a fair distance, Campbell decided that no sudden attack upon his funds was contemplated.

"Here you are," he finally declared, carefully counting the money, which the newcomer somewhat carelessly stowed away in a trouser pocket; after which there was some desultory conversation in regard to lumber and a possible rise in price of marten.

"By the way," said the customer, "might you happen to have heard of a lady name of—name something like Leary, as used to live in these parts?"

"There's the Widow Neary," Campbell informed him, "as has a small boy and takes in washin'. There's some wears boiled shirts Sundays, and the parson most all the time. She lives on the point."

"She might be the one," said the stranger, very slowly. "And she's a widow woman?"

"There's some reckons her husband's dead," answered the storekeeper. "He used to be the constable round here, before he went away. That's her boy over there, comin' to the store. Shouldn't wonder if they was out of oleo butter."

The bearded man grasped his whiskers in a rugged hand and deeply con-

sidered the boy, a lad about eight years old, who whistled and proudly carried what he called a "bowanarrer."

"Is you lookin' fer Injun scalps?" asked Campbell facetiously, as the child came in.

"Injuns is all right," asserted the latter. "One of 'em gave me the bow. I'd 'a' most killed a blue jay just now, if he hadn't flew off."

"Things has a way of flyin' off, jest when you thinks you're dead onto them," opined the stranger.

The boy looked at him, and nodded several times, for he had had experience.

"You bet!" he assented.

The man was shaving off thin flakes of Lumberman's Joy. From wrinkled slits his blue eyes peered at the child, who, conscious of a smiling observation, felt encouraged to speak.

"Last week I 'most caught a pike as long as me," he said, "only my spoon was old and the hooks rusty, so they broke. I 'most had my hand on him."

"What you wants," said the stranger, "is a new spoonhook."

"Yessir, and mummy she says I kin have a new one in a couple weeks, when she gets money from eggs. I want five pounds of oleo," added the boy, turning to Campbell.

While this order was being attended to, the bearded man turned to a little glass case filled with fishing tackle.

"Say, sonny," he asked the boy, "what's the kind o' spoon you think these here big pike in the lake takes a fancy to?"

Eagerly the little fellow came forward and gave voluble reasons for his preferences.

"I likes 'em big," he said, "'cause the big fellows takes 'em and can't break the hooks, and the little ones takes 'em, too, lots o' times."

"What d'ye think of this one?"

"Oh! Them's awful dear. They cost forty cents," declared the boy. "They've got gold on 'em."

"That's the kind I'd like to know all about," said the man, with profound gravity, as he produced the cash. "Say, mister, I'm a-taking this spoon."

"You goin' fishin'?" asked the boy breathlessly.

"I'm a sport, I am," declared the man. "I never use tackle as I don't know all about, and I got no time to try all there is. Now, you take this here spoon and try it, and then you tell me if the big ones like it. If it turns out just right, I'll get another like it, and you keep this for pay for your time, experimentin' for me."

"But I might lose it on a snag," said the boy, wide-eyed.

"In this here life a man has to run up agin' all kinds of chances," observed the stranger sententiously, as he handed the spoon, in its gaudy cardboard box, to the lad.

"Oh! Th-th-thank you," stammered the little chap, grinning all over.

"There ain't any thanks comin'," said the man. "I'm just hirin' you to find out for me what's the best spoon to use for them big fellows. Some time I may hire you to take me fishin'."

"Honest?" cried the boy.

"That's what! When I hire a guide, I want a dependable one as knows the good places. Well, so long!"

He grasped his big valise and went off toward the boarding house, leaving Campbell and the boy to discuss him eagerly. On his face, which seemed a very simple, honest one, there was a curious expression of shrewd, gratified self-approval.

"Careful is the word," he told himself. "So far, I bet no one's suspicioned me. I'm gettin' on fine."

Then he entered MacPherson's boarding house, where the cook served him with a belated breakfast, and where he made inquiries as to the prospect of work at the mill.

In the meantime the boy had dashed off to his mother's little house, bearing the precious box and the oleo, as well as the weapon from which the blue jay had had a narrow escape.

"Oh, mummy!" he cried, as soon as he reached the door. "What d'ye think has happened?"

The woman, whose face, while seamed with the imprint of a dreary life, retained traces of good looks, lifted

up her head slowly, and smiled at the joyful tone, as the breezy recital came forth.

A couple of hours later, Campbell entered the door, which, in summertime when mosquitoes did not pester too much, always stood open on the outlook of rich-hued forest and rippling lake.

"Thought I'd come over and have a word with you, Mis' Neary," he said. "I left my boy, Jack, mindin' the store."

"If it's on account of my bill—" began the woman, looking somewhat anxiously at him.

"No, ma'am," he answered. "It ain't much, and you're the kind whose credit's good. I just wanted to tell you a big chap came on the train, and was askin' about you, little while ago. Leastwise, he asked for Mis' Leary, and I says 'Neary,' and he said that must be it, and looked wonderful interested—"

"And he gave Bobby a trottin' spoon," interrupted the woman.

"Yes, ma'am. And I wanted to say if there should be any one trying to make trouble for you, me and all the other men would—"

"But you know there's only one man," the woman broke in. "And, of course, he would know my right name, and—and I don't think—"

"I reckon it's all right," said Campbell, "but I wanted to say you only need pass the word, and any one as worries you we can take care of, all right."

Just then a shadow fell on the doorway, and the stranger stood upon the sill, twisting his slouch hat in his hands and seeking to smile pleasantly.

The others looked at him in silence.

"Hello!" said the newcomer, addressing Campbell. "That tobacco you sold me has the flavor all right, an' the strength. 'Specially the strength. It's a man's smoke, all right."

"Glad you was suited," said the storekeeper, rather shortly.

"Sure thing, neighbor. I've had lots worse."

"I don't know as I caught your name down to the store," said Campbell, with a far-away look.

"No more you did, but that's easy

fixed. Where I come from, they mostly calls me 'Tonsina Bill,' from a river 'most on the other side of the country, where I once got a claim as petered out."

He had pointed vaguely toward the northwest.

"You been to the Klondike?" asked Campbell.

"To Alaska," the man informed him. "On the map of that country the Klondike's about as big as the head of a pin. Yessir, they calls me Tonsina Bill, but my right name is Smith, just plain Bill Smith."

"Glad to know you," said the storekeeper, with a politeness not altogether devoid of suspicion. "Comin' here to work at the new mill?"

The man wiped his forehead with a cheap bandanna.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Mrs. Neary uneasily.

"Thank ye kindly, ma'am. It's a hot day."

Tonsina Bill disposed himself on the end of a bench, carefully depositing his hat on the floor. Then he smiled vaguely.

"Of course I'm lookin' for work," he said at last, "and this here climate, with all them pine trees, would sure be good for my health."

There burst from him a great, hollow cough with an exceedingly artificial sound, after which he again beamed upon the company.

"Ain't terrible busy at the store just now," he casually remarked to Campbell.

"Things is quiet at present," replied the storekeeper. "Next month things'll be a-hummin', with that new mill workin' double shifts. Then, later on, the Injuns'll be getting ready to go north. I'm puttin' in two carloads of flour from Manitoba."

Very deliberately the trader opened the door of the little stove and spat into it, in courteous deference to the well-scrubbed floor. Then he stretched his long legs and pushed his hands deeply in his trouser pockets. Yet after an interval he withdrew them and began

to manicure his nails with a powerful jackknife.

There was an interval of weighty silence, during which the stranger contemplated a chromo of King Edward the Seventh, and gazed with admiration at sundry pots and pans of most praiseworthy brilliancy.

"Well! So long!" he said finally. "Thank ye kindly for the pleasure of your acquaintance, ma'am."

Campbell looked at the retiring stranger from the doorsill. The latter turned his head, and their eyes met, with a slight feeling of confusion on the part of both.

At the turn of the road, Tonsina Bill met the small boy, who ran up to him with a broad grin.

"I been gettin' spruce gum in the woods to fix the canoe," he said. "Then I'm goin' trollin', and try that spoon."

"You look out you don't upset yourself landin' them big ones," Bill warned him. "It beats anythin' how hot the weather's gettin'."

With an elaborate display of bandanna and the stretching of his powerful limbs, the man sought to give the impression of one suffering from undue warmth and fatigue. By the side of the road lay a fallen jack pine, upon which he sat down.

"How about bears in this part o' the country?" he asked, with profound seriousness. Whereupon the boy began a breezy disquisition, which was followed, on the part of Bill, with information about the big grizzlies of Alaska, and moose and sheep, and salmon crowding up the rivers, which kept the boy wide-eyed and breathless.

"But I'll tell you a lot of more wonderful things," said Tonsina Bill, "some time when you ain't got to gum up a canoe and go fishin'. Don't you reckon your mammy'd like to hear about such things?"

"Course she would," replied the boy, with the easy assurance of his years.

"There's things about grizzlies and—and suchlike as I wouldn't tell no one but you and her," the man remarked.

"We's 'most always alone," said the child.

"That 'ere Campbell—he don't come every day?" persisted Bill.

"He don't hardly never come."

"You got no notion as how he might be wantin' to marry your mother?"

"I don't reckon," said the lad dubiously. "Most likely Mis' Campbell wouldn't want him to."

Tonsina breathed a large sigh of relief.

"In course she wouldn't!" he declared. "Wonder I didn't think o' that. Here's something for you. It's a little chunk of rock with gold in it."

The boy, delighted, took the bit of quartz with the yellow spots, and Bill very gravely shook hands with him before parting.

During the afternoon the sourdough sat on the veranda of MacPherson's boarding house, watching Campbell's store from the corner of his eye. Several times he rose and apparently decided to walk forth. Then he would think better of it, and sit down again, to the study of a last year's poster of the provincial fair.

The next day he resumed his watch, and saw Campbell driving a cart toward the depot, to return later on with a heavy load of flour barrels. After this, Tonsina Bill, judging that for a time the coast would be clear, strolled away in a direction opposite to that he was aiming for. Once out of sight, he crossed the railway track, struck through thick woods, and finally turned about and made for Mrs. Neary's little frame house.

"I was just traipsing round," he explained, as the woman met him at the door. "Thought maybe I'd see the boy. Him and me we hits it off first rate."

"He's gone fishin'," she answered, looking perplexed. "And my bread is risin' and 'most ready for the oven, and I got some washin' to do."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tonsina Bill. "I can see you're no hand at bein' idle. Don't you let me hinder you none."

"Well, I thank you for givin' Bobby that spoon," said Mrs. Neary. "He

came back yesterday all crazy about goin' to Alaska and killin' big bears."

"That lad," said Bill judicially, "is goin' to be considerable of a man some day, when he gets his growth. Looks to me like you need a job of choppin' wood done, and I'm just achin' to stretch my arms out."

With this, he went off to the wood-pile, took an ax that lay beside it, and tested its edge with his thumb. Then he took a small file from his pocket and sharpened it, Indian fashion. The woman looked at him in surprise as he began smiting lustily and expertly, although she was used to the rough kindness of the men at the Landing. Then she returned, much puzzled, to her occupations.

After an hour's productive labor, Tonsina Bill went to the well, drew up a pail of water, and consumed several large dippfuls.

Mrs. Neary came out and proffered refreshment.

"No, ma'am, thankin' you kindly," he declined. "Them beans at MacPherson's, and the pie, stays by a man a long while."

"Well, won't you sit down a while and rest?" asked the woman.

The bandanna came out again, and the brow was sponged, to show that repose would be agreeable. Then Bill occupied a precarious seat on the edge of a stool, and looked about him.

"There was a man up at Valdez as knowned you," he suddenly blurted out. "Just one of them fellows like you meet, and once he tells me the finest place in Canada is MacPherson's Landing, and the finest woman is Mis' Leary, or Neary it might be. 'Also,' says he, 'there should be a boy or a girl, I don't know which.'"

The woman's hand had gone up to her breast. She leaned forward eagerly, with staring eye and open mouth, waiting for more.

"Yes, ma'am, just a kind of a man like any other, and—and he says if I ever come up this way, I could bring you somethin' as might be handy, seein' as how—as how you was a very fine woman."

Mrs. Neary paid no attention to the feebleness of this logic. She still stared at Tonsina Bill, who was gravely feeling the pockets of his coat, which he finally pulled off.

"I went and sewed the pocket," he explained, "so it would be sure not to drop out."

Taking out his knife, he ripped a strong seam of packing thread and pulled out a buckskin bag, which he handed to her.

The woman grasped it nervously.

"I made that bag!" she cried.

"Sure enough, ma'am! That's what he said, that man. He says, says he, 'When she sees that bag, she'll know it comes from me, all right.'"

With trembling fingers, she opened it and drew out a small package tightly done up in material that must have been cut out of a discarded rubber coat.

"That's for the wet and dampness," explained Tonsina Bill.

It was money, in large bills, to an amount that made the woman gasp. But suddenly she threw it on the table, as something of not the slightest importance, and looked at her visitor haggardly.

"He'd never have given you this to bring to me if he hadn't known you and trusted you," she cried. "Tell me about him! All about him! What is he doin'? Did he never speak to you about me? Did he never tell you that I was a wicked, wicked woman?"

"When a feller's way off in the beyond o' the wilderness," said Tonsina Bill, looking down at the floor, "he's apt to think of a woman he's loved, and one that's loved him, as somethin' wonderful, most terrible wonderful. And the love he had for her grows up in his memory till it's so big that she's with him, awake an' asleep, and he kinder sees her like as if she stood before him, with a hand lifted up, a-throwin' a blessin' on him like them saints in pictur's."

Mrs. Neary, sitting near the table, had lowered her face upon her bent forearm, and was weeping silently, bitter tears that burned her weary eyes.

"What did he tell you about me?" she cried.

"He said, bein' very lonesome and wishful to talk one day, as how he'd shot your brother as you thought the world on. And he said 'twas done without knowin' who he was shootin' at, because the man had broken the law and was runnin' away after holdin' up a train."

"Go on," said Mrs. Neary, gripping the rungs of the chair she occupied.

"Then he said you got terrible excited, and maybe so as you didn't just know what you was doin'. Anyways, he says you told him he'd done it a-purpose, ownin' to him hatin' the man, who'd been in bad trouble before."

"Yes, yes; and what else did he say?" cried the woman.

"Oh, he didn't say much of anythin' more," said Tonsina Bill, looking much distressed.

"Didn't he tell you that I raged at him like a madwoman, and cursed him, and ordered him out of my sight forever? Didn't he tell you that I started to leave our home, and swore I would drown myself rather than live with him again? Didn't he tell you all that?"

"He might have said a word or two of it, ma'am," replied Tonsina Bill. "And now you've got the parcel safe, I reckon I'll be goin', and—I'm terribly sorry it made you cry, and—and I swear to you, ma'am, when Bob Neary left you, he loved you, and I'm dead certain he loves you yet."

The man had risen, and his stature

seemed to have grown. There was something in him that filled the little room with an atmosphere of quiet, gentle strength, and the woman, through her tear-filled eyes, was staring at him.

"He had big, broad shoulders like you," she said excitedly. "He never wore a beard, but you've got somethin' of his looks, barring that big scar on your forehead. And your voice is—"

She had risen, also, and come nearer Tonsina Bill. Her hands trembled and her lips quivered. Then the man turned his face, uneasy beneath her penetrating stare.

"I reckon you've been livin' real quiet and happy with that little boy," he said slowly. "He's an awful fine little boy, and liable to make any—any mother happy, and so now I reckon maybe I'd better be goin' along."

He took a slow step toward the door.

"Stop!" cried the woman.

With the long-pent-up fire of her nature, she rushed at him and clutched him fiercely.

"I was a wicked fool once, and suffered for it!" she cried. "And what a fool I've been to-day! Oh, Bob! Dear Bob! Don't leave me again! I can't bear the thought of it! Stay here, Bob, with your wife and your son!"

She had thrown herself at the man's feet, imploring, and, with all the strength of a love unfaltering, the man lifted her to his breast. There, with her head resting upon his shoulder, she sobbed quietly, while a great peace entered their souls.





THE WOMAN WITH A PAST

by
ANNA ALICE CHAPIN

XIV.—THE LOST BABY

Even I already seem to share
In God's love: what does New Year's hymn declare?

If now, as formerly he trod
Paradise, his presence fills
Our earth, each only as God wills
Can work. . . .

—Pippa Passes.

BUT isn't there," the younger and sweeter-faced of the two women was arguing, "isn't there something about 'Suffer little children—'"

"My dear Clarice," struck in the older woman, in an inflexible, cheerful voice, "some one has said somewhere that you can find justification in the Bible for almost *anything* if you look hard enough for it!"

"And, in any case, that is hardly the point," said the man who was talking to them.

He was a clergyman—a very young, hard-faced clergyman, albeit not an ill-looking one—and he took his own virtues and the world's sins very seriously, indeed. At present, as he sat between the two ladies in front of the roaring logs of the hotel fire, he had the air of a young prophet or oracle, expounding Truths with a capital T.

"My dear Miss Heyward," he proceeded impressively, "you cannot get away from certain inspired words." He began to quote sonorously, as if reading from the pulpit:

"Forasmuch as all men are conceived and born in sin; and our Savior Christ saith, None can enter into the Kingdom of God, except he be regenerated and born anew of Water and of the Holy Ghost—"

He paused with a look as triumphant as he considered suitable to his cloth.

"You can't get away from that, Miss Heyward! Not from the passage following, which asks God to look upon the child to be baptized, 'that he, being delivered from thy wrath, may be received into the ark of Christ's Church.' Mark you, Miss Heyward—'delivered from thy wrath!' That admits of no misinterpretation!"

Miss Heyward looked vaguely unhappy, but she said no more, for it frightened her to try to argue. She was a gentle soul without convictions of any sort.

"Oh, *every one* knows, Mr. Arden," said Mrs. Ray comfortably, "that an unbaptized baby is a *lost* baby!"

Philippa Carpenter rose in disgust, and moved out of earshot. Stupid, narrow, horrid people! To this scornful thought was added the question: Why, oh, why, had she ever come there?

"Echo answers 'Why?'" she said to herself, half humorously, half grimly.

But she knew why perfectly well.

Pippa, the eternally young, the eternally enthusiastic, had of late lost her interest in life! She had felt suddenly jaded and old, at the very beginning of the New York winter. The passing show had seemed made only of shadows, and the cakes and ale of the good world had been as dust and ashes between her lips. At first the apathy had brought its own palliative; she had not even noticed that she was apathetic. But all at once, with a chill shock, the thing had come home to her.

"I am—old!" Pippa had gasped to her mirror.

The mirror had shaken its head in smiling negative, showing her, indeed, the same exquisite white-rose skin and wine-red hair, the same delicately wistful lips and purple-gray eyes as of other days. But a shadow had come, and stood behind Pippa's chair, and grinned at her in the glass, and she had risen, shuddering.

"I am not old yet," she had thought, "but I shall be soon, if—if I go on *feeling* as I do!"

She had sent for the motor, and had gone to see her doctor—not a fashionable physician, but a calm, wise little French savant, who had a knack of treating peoples' hearts and souls as well as their bodies. He had smiled when Mrs. Carpenter, looking particularly lovely in violet velvet and white fox, had explained her case.

"Now, how easy it would be," he had remarked whimsically, "to exclaim: '*You old, madame?* You are the incarnation of youth, of beauty, of—' And it would be true!" The motion of his fine silver head had been barely an inclination. "And yet—and yet—I know well what you mean! I, who have been striving to learn the art of healing for forty years, know very well what you mean, madame. *La vieillesse de l'âme*—the old age of the soul! Ah, yes! It has not come to you yet, madame, but—it might come."

He had pondered a moment. A bar of December sunlight had struck across

his desk, and illuminated the lines that the years had drawn upon his handsome, old face. Very kindly lines they were, and now they had suddenly deepened to a smile.

"Up in the north of New England," he had said, "in what you call the—camping territory?—yes!—up there is a little inn that keeps open all the year round. In midwinter there are but a few people there, but it remains, I believe, quite comfortable. It is in the heart of the pine forests, and there is a lake; that will be all ice by now, I imagine. You can know the winds there, madame, and smell the true scent of the snow. I have sent many there, sick in mind or body, for it is close—as close as is practicable for civilized folk in winter—to the heart of nature. Go there, madame. Leave behind you your—ravishing frocks"—again the gentle, almost imperceptible movement of the head—"and leave, too, your delightful *mondaine* life and atmosphere, and make a pilgrimage to the pine forests and the frozen lake. Unless," he had added, more doubtfully, "you object to leaving town just now? It is, to be sure, almost Christmas time."

Mrs. Carpenter had shivered.

"Christmas time!" she had repeated, with an edge in her voice. "What have I to do with Christmas time? Christmas time is for stockings—and trees—and—"

She had caught her breath and stopped.

The old doctor had not looked at her. He had understood altogether too well.

"*Bien entendu*," he had said cheerfully, "you will go, then? Talk to the winds, madame, and see if they do not tell you some secrets that are worth while—some secrets, for instance, about"—he had smiled—"eternal youth!"

Philippa had risen, drawing her white furs about her.

"I will go to-morrow," she had said.

The French doctor had been right. It would be hard to imagine a civilized dwelling for mankind situated closer to primitive nature's heart. It was miles from any railroad. Supplies came up

the lake twice a week—by steamboat when the water was "open," by sledge when the ice had locked it. Here, in the shadow of a dark and lowering mountain wall, gloomed the sighing pine forests. And here, among those most human and wistful of trees, was the Wood Rest, for so the little inn was felicitously named.

Only a few wayfarers "rested" here now, and they were obviously—or so it seemed to Pippa—those whom the world had flung or pushed aside. Even Mrs. Ray, the acidulated church-woman, was in some obscure way pathetic in her isolation and exile. One wondered if she had children or relatives who were thanking Heaven to be rid of her at Christmas.

Clarice Heyward was a frightened-looking, young old maid, recovering from "excessive school-teaching." Pippa rather liked her, and was decidedly sorry for her, but Miss Heyward had that curiously cautious flair for things outside her pale which is almost always found in the truly virtuous. She sensed in Mrs. Carpenter something that, if not precisely lawless or improper, was at least unconventional—elastic, convenient, meaningless word—and drew her shabby skirts aside accordingly.

There were perhaps half a dozen other inmates of Wood Rest—a consumptive musician, a well-known actress recuperating, a gouty broker who would not go outdoors at all, but sat all day cursing deeply over the big fire in the oak-raftered hall, and the Reverend Clarence Arden, who was understood to be somewhat broken in health, and, further, to be finishing a work of theological import, for which the quiet and solitude of the pine woods were essential. With none of these did Pippa Carpenter have anything in common—even the recuperating actress looked ill-humored and dyspeptic—and so, mindful of the old doctor's advice, she spent the greater part of her time wandering along the shore of the chill, gray lake, or exploring the sighing woods that pressed so close about the inn.

This afternoon, turning in revolt from that complacent discussion of the

Baptism of Infants, she fled, as usual, not to her room, but to the great winter-filled out-of-doors, that the clean air might wash that overheard bigotry from her brain. She thought of the clergyman with a shudder of especial disgust.

"If the Church is founded upon a rock—that's the rock!" she thought, frowning at the memory of the granite-like good looks of the young ecclesiastic.

The next moment, she was outside the inn, buffeted by the December wind, and able to forget her mood of indignation. She went down to the very edge of the lake, and stood there in the waning light for many minutes.

It seemed as if she saw for the first time fully what the doctor had meant. Here before her lay land and water, with the mask of death upon it—since, in nature, winter must ever symbolize death. Yet, even across that still wilderness of rough, gray ice, even from these wailing pines, that crowded like mourners about the house, came the voice and the breath of Life itself. Death, then, could not be real; old age must be an evil dream. For nature, who never lies, either in fact or in metaphor, proclaimed the fresh vigor of youth and vitality in the very teeth of frost and melancholy. The rushing wind blew straight to Pippa's heart. Yes, it was youth she felt, youth and the joy of living and doing once more, and an uplift of something more than her heart alone.

It came to her suddenly—as she watched the gray twilight deepen, and drank the sharp, snow-flavored gale, which was rising with every minute—that it was Christmas Eve.

For a moment the terrible loneliness of that thought struck her through and through like an icy blade. Then she flung up her head and faced it along with the wind. There had been other Christmas Eves worse than this; here, at least, she was alone.

Voices near at hand, heard intermittently above the rush of the air, came to her ears:

"Seems a pity—Christmas Eve an' all!"

"Poor soul! I heard say she couldn't last long, an' mebbe the best thing, too."

"But, then, what'll become o' the baby?"

Now, there were a few words that were absolutely, definitely certain to catch Pippa Carpenter's interest at any or all times; one of them was "baby." Like many childless women, she was a born mother, and yearned over every pink scrap of humanity she saw.

Turning quickly, she caught sight of two of the inn guides. She knew both by sight.

"Who is ill?" she asked, without preamble.

"Woman back at Miller's Camp, ma'am," said the older of the two men. "Used to come up here with her family an' camp, they say, but left years ago. I don't remember her myself. She come up here a while back and rented that drafty old log cabin."

"An' she's got a baby, only three or four months old," put in the other warmly. "She's got a cough, an' I guess she's real sick, but the women hereabouts, they won't do nothin'. Seems she ran away, or somethin'. But it's a darned shame—that's what I say—lettin' a sick woman alone weather like this—an' it Christmas Eve an' all!"

He was young and a sentimentalist.

"Where is Miller's Camp?" Pippa asked abruptly.

It took her only about ten minutes to reach it. There were various cabins and bungalows dotted about among the pines—summer camps that would be pleasant enough from April to October, but bitterly uncomfortable during December weather. Of these, Miller's Camp was the least habitable, and the farthest from the inn and the lake. At last she came to it—a lonely little cabin swept by the winds that roared down an old lumber trail close at hand.

Pippa went in, and closed the door.

The Reverend Clarence Arden, discussing Chinese politics with the gouty broker in the half hour preceding dinner, was startled by a singularly sweet and imperative voice speaking his name. He was further disconcerted by the

sight of the owner of the voice—an unusually beautiful person, in coat and cap of sealskin. The warm tones of the fur melted into a ripple of deep red hair. Even the frosty air outside had been barely able to send a fleck of color into the white cheeks. The purple-gray eyes burned at him; in some way, guiltless as he knew himself to be in all ways, they made him feel vaguely afraid.

"Mr. Arden," she said brusquely, but not discourteously, "will you please come with me at once?"

Like one mesmerized, Arden rose and followed her.

"Get your hat and coat," she told him, and he obeyed like a child.

"Now come!" she said.

They went out into the chilly uproar of the winter dusk. The blast was tearing in from the north across the frozen lake; the pines were screaming under the lash of it. It was almost impossible to catch one's breath at first, and Arden offered his companion his arm. She shook her head. As they reached the lee of a wing of the inn, they paused for a moment, and Pippa spoke:

"I am taking you to a sick woman, Mr. Arden—one whom I believe you can help. I suppose that is enough for a clergyman?"

She was glad that he said at once, and sincerely:

"Quite enough. You are sure you will not take my arm? The wind is very severe."

"I think I can get along, thanks."

They went forward into the darkness of the pines, she leading the way. Sometimes she staggered from the gale and the rough going, but she pressed on unrestingly.

Short as the distance was, it seemed a long time before they found themselves at that desolate door, and Pippa said:

"It is here."

In a moment they were inside. Such a sad room as it was! The fire was dying on the hearth; the wind shrieked outside. From a dim corner came the low wail of a baby.

Pippa flung off coat and cap, and went to quiet the baby. As she did so,

she flung over her shoulder a careless command to "get the things out of the coat pockets." Rather dazed, Arden lifted the fur garment; even the wind had not been able to utterly destroy the faint, elusive perfume that clung to it. From one pocket he extracted a small screw-top jar, from the other a pint thermos bottle.

Holding a small, whimpering bundle against her breast, Philippa raised her eyes to the young man's face.

"Mr. Arden," she said, in a low voice, "in that room—there—with the door almost closed—is the sick woman I told you of. I don't know what is the matter with her, but there is no doctor within call here, and anyway I believe that she is more ill in mind than in body. Did I say mind? I mean—heart; Did you ever hear of—Alice Clement?"

The clergyman started.

"I was engaged to her," he said, in a bewildered way. "But that was—five years ago."

"You did not marry her because her people were—beneath you—isn't that true? Wait! I know, because she told me everything. You met her here, the year before you finally took orders, and fell in love, but because you were thinking of your career, you had not the courage or the manhood to—make good. She loved you, but when she found how little she counted in your life, she rebelled. In a fit of pique, she ran away with another man. It was rather a scandal, in a small way. Is all that true?"

He drew a long breath.

"It is—yes; it is all true."

Pippa's voice softened a little.

"Did you know," she said, "that every year at this time, the season when you had first met, she has come back here simply to renew her memory of you?"

He bowed his head.

"No," he said, "I did not know. But—I this year have done the same. That is really why I am here. Memory was too strong for me."

"You!" exclaimed Pippa incredulously.

The hard shell of the man was not yet broken, but it seemed to her that

she could see the possibilities, as it were, of coming, hopeful cracks.

"I—I have hardly allowed myself to think why I came back," Arden hastened to explain, though still in a low voice. "I made excuses to myself—and always had good reasons—my theological work—"

Something of his wonted self-importance returned fleetingly to his tone.

"Yes," broke in Philippa dryly. "I know. I've heard of it. You have played your part very well, Mr. Arden. No one could possibly suspect you of a romance, even in retrospect!"

"It is not precisely—romance—" said the clergyman, as if trying to analyze and differentiate carefully. "It is merely—"

Pippa Carpenter lost patience.

"And this?" she said, and held out her arms with something in them.

The Reverend Mr. Arden changed color, and a look of horror crossed his chiseled face.

"Her child!" he whispered. "Her child—and his!"

"Yes," said Pippa relentlessly, not permitting herself to be moved by his obvious suffering. "The child of a live, human man, who loved her enough to—take her! I don't know even if the poor little love has a name! And I know," she went on fiercely, "he's never been baptized! So I suppose he is—lost?"

The clergyman, at sea among strange, living facts, groped for the safe and familiar rocks of his traditions.

"It—I mean, he—should be baptized at once," he said.

He thought that the fire had overflowed the hearth, as Mrs. Carpenter confronted him.

"If you dare to waste time baptizing that baby—" she gasped, white with rage. Sharply she controlled herself, and her lips set themselves tightly.

"I brought some milk down with me from the inn," she said, with comparative calm. "Get it. It's in that jar. And there's a little saucepan hanging on a nail on the farther wall. Get that. Now—heat the milk!"

For one brief, breathless moment it occurred to Mr. Arden to rebel.

"But—" he began.

"Heat it, please; the baby needs it," said Pippa.

And he went unhappily for the milk and the saucepan. Pippa was already unscrewing the other bottle, and pouring out hot broth for the sick woman.

"Don't let the milk boil!" she cautioned, as she went lightly into the next room.

Mr. Arden held the little saucepan over the blaze—such a very inadequate blaze, too!—and considered the various upheavals of the last hour. The baby, which, according to his most sacred convictions, was "lost," lay on a chair and regarded him. After a while it emitted a faint gurgle. Arden, greatly startled, nearly dropped the saucepan.

At the same moment, Pippa came back into the room, closing the door softly behind her.

"I—I think it's ready," said Mr. Arden nervously.

Mrs. Carpenter smothered a forgiving smile, and said, as she took the saucepan:

"See if you can find a spoon in that drawer over there."

He went meekly to look.

"How—is she?" he asked, having returned with the spoon.

"She's very weak," said Pippa quietly, "and very, very unhappy. Of course, she should never have come up here in this weather, but—the man is dead, and she has no other ties, and she says it made her feel less lonely to come to the place where you and she had once been happy together for a little while — Just a moment! I think she called."

To Mr. Arden's horror, she put the lost baby into his arms, before she went to the door. The lost baby gurgled again ingratiatingly; it almost smiled. The young clergyman felt distinctly odd; he had never held a baby before except at the font when he was baptizing one. He looked doubtfully down at the small, crinkled, pink face. "Lost"—that was what he had said of babies such as this. Condemned to

eternal death, forbidden that gracious Welcome given once on a time to all little children—this helpless, nestling, not wholly disagreeable little—

"I'll take him now," said Pippa busily.

She wondered if it were her imagination that made it seem as if the man gave up the child almost reluctantly.

"Do, please, build up the fire," she said, and the clergyman carried an armful of wood from the pile in the corner of the cabin. There were bits of damp bark sticking to his admirable black clothes when he had finished with the fire, but he quite forgot to brush them off. The blaze leaped gayly up the chimney, and in its riotous singing and sputtering vied with the crying wind outside. The gale was still fierce, and the call and wail of it was like that of ghosts and witches riding the storm.

Inside, the ruddy light played everywhere now, and shone with a special kindliness upon the baby lying on Pippa's lap—a baby like all other babies since the world began, even like that other Baby in the East two centuries since. We do not often think of Him as cooing and gurgling in the straw, and yet it must have been like that.

Pippa looked up at Arden.

"Go in there!" she said, under her breath—the words came with a rush—"go in there, not as a priest, but as a man—if you can."

The goad was not intentionally applied, but the young clergyman winced under it. Pippa plunged on:

"Go in, and take her hand, and make her tell you what she's gone through—all the pain she's borne, and all the sins she's sinned. Oh, if you've one spark of *God* in you—go in!"

The Reverend Clarence Arden went into the other room, and Pippa rocked the baby in her arms, and tried to sing a lullaby, and cried all the time.

All the pent-up mother passion in her welled forth like a fountain unsealed, and she was filled with—was it happy pain, or tragic rapture? She buried her face on the baby's little, warm body, and tried to dream what it would be like to hold thus in her arms, against her heart,

something that was flesh of her flesh, blood of her blood.

"You are as wonderful—as wonderful as first love!" she whispered to the lost baby, who promptly went to sleep.

Then she began to think. She yearned to do something for the woman in the next room, but her hands seemed tied; one couldn't offer her charity, and yet if any one in the world ever needed it, she did! Then came an inspiration.

Philippa seized one of her dogskin gloves, and into it she stuffed every ring and brooch that she was wearing—worth some thousands of dollars.

"Anybody can accept jewelry as a Christmas present," she reasoned.

She fastened the glove to the mantelpiece with a pearl stickpin, and caught the lost baby to her breast once more.

"Oh, darling," she murmured brokenly, "it isn't exactly what anybody could call a *stocking*, but—honey love, you've given me a Christmas—a real, hang-your-stockings-up, *baby* Christmas!"

Arden came back very white, but there was a look in his eyes that Philippa had not seen there before. He stood by the fireplace looking down into the flame for a long minute without speaking. Pippa still rocked the baby and crooned to it very softly. The tears had dried on her cheeks, but she looked very, very tired. The eternal hurt of frustrated motherhood stared from her eyes, but she did not know it.

After a while the clergyman spoke.

"He—the man—never married her," he said rather harshly.

"I know," said Pippa, rocking the baby gently to and fro.

"But—but"—for the first time she heard him stammer, eagerly, almost boyishly—"I—I swear to you, Mrs. Carpenter, I believe she's—at heart—as good and pure as—as you yourself!"

Philippa laid the baby down, still gently, but very, very quickly. She was whiter than ever as she rose. But she brushed her own feelings aside to put her hand on his arm.

"You must make it up to her," she said. "You must make it all up to her."

She waited for his answer, and was half surprised that it came so simply.

"Yes," said Mr. Arden.

The firelight danced over the room restfully. The lost baby slept in its glow. There was a glimpse through an open door of a quiet, white bed.

"She fell asleep while I was sitting by her," said the man irreverently.

Philippa nodded understandingly. She still kept her hand on his arm. There seemed so much to say, and no one but her to say it!

"Life is always changing," she said slowly, "being built up, or torn down. And—sometimes—we can't be sure, all at once, which it is that is happening. Sometimes it seems as if it were all—all taking away—tearing apart"—her lips quivered—"but even *then* we can't be certain. It may be only that They, the Fate people, just want to build it over again—better. But if ever something is put into our own hands to build with, we've got to go ahead and build! Do you understand? *We've got to build!*"

The Reverend Mr. Arden was still staring into the fire, and answered never a word, but Pippa knew that he had heard.

All at once she started, and pulled out her watch.

"Why—it's Christmas!" she said, in a hushed voice.

The man turned and looked through the half-open door into the room beyond. The wind had begun to grow drowsy, and the cabin was at peace.

"We shall be married as soon as she is strong enough," said the Reverend Clarence Arden.

"And—the lost baby?" said Pippa, with a smile behind the tears.

Arden put out an awkward hand to touch the warm bundle. She had lifted the child preparatory to carrying him in to sleep beside his mother. There was a quaint mixture of tenderness and shyness in the twist of the man's mouth.

"Do you know," he said, and there was no trace of hardness left in his clear-cut young face, "I think, maybe, it might have been *my* soul that would have been lost, if it hadn't been for—the lost baby!"



PLAYS AND PLAYERS

B A FIRST NIGHTER

THERE was no special trumpeting done for Sir Johnstone Forbes-Robertson on his farewell tour. There has been nothing spectacular about his long career on the stage, which is to end with this "farewell tour." Nothing attaches to him to make the crowd rush to see him out of curiosity. If the theater at which he appeared in New York was packed for most of his performances—and it was—there was some deep, sustained, normal reason for it. For "Hamlet" all performances were sold out a week in advance. Why?

Well, for a cause that is not limited to the theater and the joys of the theater. Tensely let us say because there is need felt by people to-day for beauty in their thinking. This need is becoming more clearly defined every day in the consciousnesses of those who feel it. It is a need felt for art as a factor in their daily living.

And what is art? Hearken to Tolstoi: "Art is an organ of the life of mankind, converting the consciousness of people into feeling." It is a need of beauty and nobility of impulse and thought and aim, a deeper mental satisfaction, an idealism that is practical and a daily practice that is ideal. And where that need is being felt and is being somewhat defined to its own comprehension, there is art's renascence.

This is the hour in America when that self-defined and self-discerned need

in the mass of the nation has put at the head of the nation a man who sees nationalism as a supreme art, and not primarily as a business—nor as a racket to toss the ball of politics for some silver trophy and a champion's belt. This act of the public politically denotes where the mass of its thinking, feeling people stand to-day in the matter of recognizing its needs and seeking satisfaction.

Herein lies the greatest opportunity ever yet offered in America for an actor with talents of sufficient magnitude to achieve lasting fame in the annals of our stage. He has only to be sufficiently pure-minded and unselfed to perceive the public need of things of a high intellectual and emotional quality, and then to adapt himself and his talents to the massed inspiration. This is art's true service.

America is rich in having at least two actors capable of filling such a position. We respectfully offer the suggestion to the serious contemplation of Mr. Walker Whiteside and Mr. Frank Reicher. There is more than enough room for both.

All this is behind the splendid success of Forbes-Robertson's farewell visit to New York. His art gave the audiences that deeper satisfaction which they craved; gave them things of satire, comedy, pathos, tragedy, profound and searching truths, in the mantle of beauty.

It is the visible beauty of his *Hamlet* that impresses first. A princely and lovable grace marks his entrance. Bearing, movements, gestures depict an elegance that is not only of rank and outward habit, but of nature. His voice, though no longer vibrant with youth, is still beautiful with expressiveness. It has a poignancy and reserve in passages of tenderness and pathos that make its utterances reach the heart.

He establishes the idea of *Hamlet's* unfitness to cope with the life in which he finds himself, by several fine touches. For instance, we see *Hamlet* meet all newcomers with a spontaneous friendliness, though it is always the friendliness of a prince, and with a smile and a gesture that seem to say: "Let me trust you; do not betray my faith." There is something naïve, charmingly youthful, in this; and it contrasts well with the moods of suspicion and the pain of betrayal that follow. It is perhaps the most appealing point in the artist's characterization, this delicate insistence on the friendliness of the young prince, who, conscious of his own weakness, yearns for the strength that might come through sympathetic understanding and a loyal love.

In the scene with the players, he is again especially successful in suggesting the natural character of *Hamlet*—his charm, sweetness, sincerity, and eagerness—before too much brooding turned it to bitterness. To the very end there are glimpses of this; and they recur with added poignancy. And the thing that takes hold of your heart-strings is this gracefully painted portrait of the prince who would have been so royal in kindness, so generous of the largess of tenderness and happiness, so gladly crowned with benefits bestowed for love, so swiftly withered by the dread demand for vengeance from the ghost of an earlier and a more ruthless type of kingship. In such moments Forbes-Robertson's art, however beautiful in what it depicts, is perhaps most beautiful in what it suggests.

The characterization is always poetic. Even though *Hamlet* condemned his own verses to *Ophelia*, Forbes-Robert-

son's figure of the prince makes one wonder if Shakespeare did not write down in *Hamlet's* lines all the aspiration and defeat and misunderstanding his own heart had known; for there are times when "the melancholy Dane" seems the heir apparent of art rather than of an ancient throne.

The reading is lucid, simple, and revealing. We doubt if there is anything finer to be heard than the rendition of "Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt!"

A point very important to the play, but frequently slurred over or quite omitted, is in this instance made emphatic, with the result that the whole story, with the motives and passions of the characters, becomes much clearer. This is in *Horatio's* speech in the first scene, where he tells the history of the dead king's struggle with *Fortinbras*. It brings special significance to all the other motivation of the tragedy, and gives the play's conclusion the cumulative dramatic potency that the author meant it to have.

The thrusts at *Polonius* are delivered with a delicate, biting wit, but the reproof to *Rosencrantz* and *Guildenstern* has less of the severity and scorn usually read into it, and more of the idea of a lonely prince's withdrawal of his heart from friends who had disappointed it.

Gertrude Elliott is appealing and sincere as *Ophelia*, and her mad scene is prettily and pathetically done in a radiant garden setting. The audience yielded its tears to her sympathetic depiction of the fragile little brain gone pitifully awry.

The performances of "The Light that Failed" were instructive on two counts. There was, first of all, the star's beautiful performance as *Dick Heldar*. Again that word "beautiful." It is impossible to cast it aside and yet continue to write veraciously of Forbes-Robertson's acting. It was a gripping and a tearful experience to watch his *Heldar* in the agonies of rebuffed love and oncoming blindness.

And later, there is a brief scene not easily forgotten when the blind *Dick*

Heldar fumbles to the window, throws it wide to the moonlight and the music of the passing regiment, and paces the marching step alone in his cage of darkness, while from the next room echoes of shouts and toasts reach his ears; the other war correspondents, his associates in several campaigns, are celebrating on the eve of departure. It is not a good play, but it should be seen for these things.

It is interesting to note here how great a change has taken place in the popular ideal since "The Light that Failed" was written. The enthusiasm of the correspondents did not strike an answering chord in the audience. War has ceased to be an ideal. We see it as slaughter, and know that the glory of it is generally to put gold in some magnate's pocket rather than to put new stars in the sky-flung banner. It was not because the spectators were indifferent or hostile to the idea of British conquest under arms; it was because of a distinct feeling of opposition to the whole ideal for any nation.

This was emphasized when "Cæsar and Cleopatra" was staged later in the engagement. The Shaw play has a scene where *Cæsar* upbraids *Cleopatra* for having stabbed an enemy in the back. After pointing out how vengeance piles upon vengeance and recrimination upon recrimination and war upon war, he winds up that this must go on "until the gods grow weary of blood and breed them a race that can understand." The applause that burst upon this speech was like a thunder-storm. It held up the action of the piece for several seconds. The cause of that applause was the reason why the Kipling spirit of empire in the other

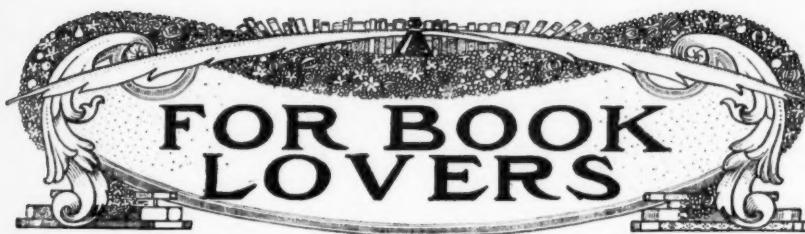
play did not find response. Yet "The Light that Failed" should be seen, by all means, for the sake of *Dick Heldar*.

Miss Elliott's *Cleopatra* is her acme in this repertoire. It is probably the best thing she has ever done. It is excellent. The Shaw play is a big thing in intent, and it tells many true words of men and women, high and low, and of the motives that sway them.

We wonder if Shaw meant a sly dig at women when he delineated the character of *Cleopatra*. He presents her as a kittenish child of the schoolgirl type, selfish, vain, superstitious. She is taught the elements of majesty by *Cæsar*, and she begins to put these in practice by beating a slave and kicking her nurse. Her highest act of power is the treacherous murder of *Porthinus*, who is stabbed at her command by her nurse as he is leaving the palace with the promise of *Cæsar's* friendship. *Porthinus* had dared to tell the truth about her. Is it power that Shaw is satirizing here? Or is it the woman in power? Somebody should ask him.

As your taste is classic or modern, you will prefer Forbes-Robertson's *Cæsar* or his *Hamlet*. In beauty of execution, they are equal. This actor's technique is like velvet shoes for a king—the conceived character mounts so smoothly the steps of the drama. *Cæsar*, as written, is an intellectual study, designed to appeal to men's reason as well as to their mirth. The emotional appeal is secondary at all times, when it is there at all. It is in presenting this intellectual conception as a feeling man as well as a thinker that the actor's art seems finest and most penetrative.

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FOR BOOK LOVERS

THE Senior Surgeon and the White Linen Nurse, especially the Senior Surgeon, assuredly made things very unpleasant for each other, and for no adequate reason—or lack of reason, for that matter.

If any sufficient motive, either of circumstance or character, or both, were apparent for the hysterical antics of these two, there would be more point to Eleanor Hallowell Abbott's book, "The White Linen Nurse," which the Century Company has published.

One can easily conceive that Rae Malgregor had some grounds for the outburst by which she is introduced to the reader. It is not difficult to understand the effect of the strain of two years of hospital nursing, with all of the tension of discipline, and anxiety, and work, and watching, and to sympathize with the impulse to break away from it all, and indulge one's emotions, especially when one is young, and unused to self-repression. Therefore, she is not altogether impossible.

But the Senior Surgeon—well, it's hard to believe that in real life he would be able to hold his job, even if he succeeded in securing it. Such a man might cut some figure as an operatic star, but the patience, the technical manual skill, the steady nerve, and the courage that make a successful surgeon, are not to be found in a man as self-indulgent as Doctor Faber is shown to be.

As a farce, however, the story is not to be criticized, for it has all the essential elements of a farce, even including its vulgarities. It is only the dedication of the book makes one suspect that

perhaps it was not intended to be a farce.

* * *

Though B. M. Bower has used for her new story, "The Gringos," published by Little, Brown & Co., an earlier period than that to which she has hitherto devoted herself, this is the only respect in which it differs from "Chip of the Flying U," "Good Indian," or any of the rest. In other words, it is a cowboy story, pure and simple. Even the fact that the scene is laid in California instead of Montana has not served to effect a change in local color.

It is a story of the "Forty-niners," or is intended so to be. The opening chapters of the book purport to give a picture of San Francisco, showing the summary methods of the vigilance committee, but it would equally well describe the life and methods of a Montana mining camp forty years later, at least as the fiction of the mining camps describe them.

The heroes of the story—there are two of them—are Dade Hunter and Jack Allen, of the familiar Owen Wister cowboy type. They have come to California from Texas as gold-seekers, and, having found their mine, drift back to cow-punching as employees of Don Andres Picardo, a "Spanish grandee." The latter's daughter, Señorita Teresita, though not really a cowgirl, takes that part sufficiently well to round out the book as a typical cowboy yarn.

Persistent readers of the literature of the ranch, if we may call it so, will find no cause for complaint in perusing this book, although it must be said that there

is more description and less action than in the average story of this kind.



Another volume of Ralph D. Paine's sea stories has been published by Charles Scribner's Sons, under the title of "The Adventures of Captain O'Shea."

This book will without doubt receive an enthusiastic welcome from Mr. Paine's admirers in spite of the fact that the stories themselves do not measure up to the Paine standard.

In our opinion, the publishers would have been wiser if they had transposed the position of the first and last stories, and opened the volume with "The Branded Man," which is by all odds the best of the collection, as "The Castaways" is the poorest.

The latter is rather poorly told, poorly, that is, for Mr. Paine, and its theme is the old one of Cuban filibustering in the period just preceding the Spanish-American War. The glaring improbabilities of the tale are magnified by a somewhat careless manner of handling them. Such material as it contains can always be made to assume an appearance of verisimilitude, but a considerable amount of hard work is required to produce the results.

In "The Branded Man," on the other hand, there is ample evidence of effective labor, for with equally difficult material, Mr. Paine has produced a story that is quite convincing.

This is not, strictly speaking, a volume of short stories, running, as these stories do, from twenty to forty thousand words in length.



Obviously a story with a purpose is Frederick Trevor Hill's "Thirteenth Juror," published by the Century Company. And, like all such tales, it has the added distinction of "timeliness." We have the testimony of the publishers that this is so in their announcement that it is "a novel of vital interest

to every man that votes and every woman that wants to!"

The law's delays, a subject joyously exploited by contemporary political spellbinders, is the theme of Mr. Hill's book.

If Mr. Hill had confined himself to his story, the story of the case of the Farm Supply Company against David Gedney, the book would have had more of the character of a novel, and less that of a lawyer's brief. If he had developed in detail the heartbreaking difficulties encountered by the aged defendant and his attorney in their attempts to force the case to a hearing, he would have produced a vitally interesting story, and a convincing human document.

Instead of this, however, he has given a mere outline of his plot, and has gone out of his way to bolster it up—presumably—by the citation of authorities, i. e., by accounts of actual cases, or by what the reader may reasonably infer to be actual cases.

Of course, this has nothing to do with the art of novel writing.

Nevertheless, it must be admitted that Mr. Hill has succeeded in producing a book that has its share of interest, and doubtless it will find many readers who will be satisfied with that.



It would be interesting to know just what it was that induced Robert Herrick to forsake, even temporarily, his chosen field as a novelist, a field in which his position is secure, to write such a story as "His Great Adventure," published by the Macmillan Company.

Not that the story of the new book, as a story, is anything that Mr. Herrick need necessarily be ashamed of. There are a good many writers of adventure stories, such as this is, who would be glad to claim it as their own. It is only that it seems rather cheap for an author of the class to which Mr. Herrick belongs, and it seems so only by contrast to such novels as "Together."

The impression one gets in reading this story is that Mr. Herrick wrote it principally to convince himself, or

somebody else, that he could write it for the market that demands melodramatic adventure.

For this is what the story is, from the time Edgar Brainard, the disappointed playwright, picked up old Krutzmacht in the streets of New York, and received from him the strange commission in behalf of "Melody," to his final triumph in supplying drama "for the people."

Brainard's rescue of the Krutzmacht securities in San Francisco, his flight to Europe, his negotiations with the German bankers, his discovery and operation of the "Sulfur" mine in Arizona, all incidents in his search for Melody, fill the pages of the book with action enough to satisfy a much more ambitious adventure writer than Mr. Herrick has hitherto shown himself to be.

One may say that the story is preposterous and impossible, but no one can deny that it is interesting.



"Murder in Any Degree" is a volume of short stories by Owen Johnson, published by the Century Company.

Most of the stories are devoted to an exposition of various phases of the marriage problem in what advertising men like to call a thoroughly "up-to-date" fashion.

There is a good deal of sophisticated discussion of the general subject of marriage by a little coterie of artists—meaning, by the word, literary men, as well as painters and sculptors, and critics of all three—who have been gathered together by Mr. Johnson in a convenient club atmosphere.

Steingall, Doctor Bollyer, Quinny, Towsy, Rankin, and Stibo exchange views on the topic, which one would hardly imagine likely to interest men of their type at all, and the general impression is rather vaguely conveyed to

the reader that the only point of agreement among them is their rather low opinion of women as wives.

In the opening story, after a somewhat uninteresting discussion, Herrkimer comes in and, by way of illustrating and emphasizing the impression already referred to, he tells them the sad tale of how an artist of great promise, known to all of them, has been transformed by his wife into a highly successful Wall Street broker.

This sufficiently suggests the character of the other stories contained in this volume.

The one that appears under the title, "One Hundred in the Dark," relates the incident on which Mr. Johnson subsequently based his novel, "The Sixty-first Second," though it has been necessarily much amplified to meet the exigencies of a long story.

Important New Books

"Richard Furlong," E. Temple Thurston; D. Appleton & Co.

"Gold," Stewart Edward White; Doubleday, Page & Co.

"The Story of Harvard," Arthur S. Pier; Little, Brown & Co.

"If You Touch Them They Vanish," Gouverneur Morris; Charles Scribner's Sons.

"A Fool and His Money," George Barr McCutcheon; Dodd, Mead & Co.

"Partners," Margaret Deland; Harper & Bros.

"The Way Home," Basil King; Harper & Bros. —

"Bendish?" Maurice Hewlett; Charles Scribner's Sons.

"The Garden Without Walls," Coningsby Dawson; Henry Holt & Co.

"The Man Who Saw Worry," Jacob Fisher; John C. Winston Co.

"Sons and Lovers," D. H. Lawrence; Mitchell Kennerley.

"The Law Bringers," G. B. Lancaster; George H. Doran Co.

"The Wallet of Time," William Winter; Moffat, Yard & Co.

"The Wondrous Life," Charles Marriott; Bobbs-Merrill Co.

"The Lost Road," Richard Harding Davis; Charles Scribner's Sons.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

A MERRY CHRISTMAS to you! May you make others merry and happy, for that is the surest way of obtaining happiness for yourselves. By the way, why confine our expressions of "good will toward men" to December the twenty-fifth? Our modern wise men, while unable to place the date of the nativity, seem pretty well agreed that it was not December 25, for that day is at the height of the rainy season in Judea, when neither flocks nor shepherds could have been at night in the fields of Bethlehem. The one way in which we can make sure of celebrating Christmas on Christmas Day is to carry our Christmas spirit with us throughout every one of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. This, incidentally, would be pretty apt to insure us all "a happy New Year."



AFTER reading Egerton Castle's delightful little Christmas sketch in this number, we found ourselves longing for the glamorous days of old. Or, if compelled to live in the present, we yearned for the romantic Latin Quarter that Molly Elliot Seawell has so charmingly pictured for us. And then we remembered Leonard Merrick's hero, and decided that "George," the successful Chicago business man, is typical of the human race. In its salad days, it saw the world through rose-colored glasses; plain men and women were knights and ladies fair. But now that the race is older, it is more exacting. If we could go back to its youth, we would be just as disappointed with the world as was "George" in revisiting the Latin Quarter of his student days. Romance? Yes, if we can have it with porcelain tubs, hot and cold running water, steam heat, telephone, and all-night elevator service. Otherwise, we would rather merely have it pictured for us, please. We'd much rather be on Michigan Boulevard and read of the dear, old Boul Miche, than be on the dear, old Boul Miche reading of Michigan Boulevard. In other words, AINSLEE's and a por-

celain tub in preference to a rococo castle with only an atmosphere of romance.



INSTEAD of issuing a general announcement of AINSLEE's plans for the coming year, we asked you in our last talk with you to consider the contents of this January issue as indicating in a general way what we expect to accomplish during 1914. If you have read Kate Jordan's absorbing mystery novel, Molly Elliot Seawell's appealing story of the Latin Quarter, the first of "The Romances of Sandy McGrab," William Slavens McNutt's thrilling tale of the Northwest, and all the rest of them, we think you will agree with us that we have put together an attractive and convincing prospectus of "the magazine that entertains" for the new year.

On the whole, you will find AINSLEE's for 1914 a crisp, clean, well-balanced magazine of fiction, sometimes strong, sometimes sprightly, never flabby, and always entertaining. The growing popularity of AINSLEE's and other periodicals of the same class is, to us, adequate answer to the pessimist, who, basing his conclusion on the commercial success of certain recent plays and stories, says that this country, intellectually, is at the age of the little boy who thinks it "devilish" to write on the barn door the bad words he has learned from the coachman's son.



EDITH MACVANE came into prominence as a writer of sparkling romance largely through her novelettes in this magazine. "The Adventures of Joujou," an immediate book success after its publication in the August, 1905, number of AINSLEE's, was followed by "The Matchmaker" and "The Wayward Scales," in 1907 issues; "The Comedienne," in collaboration with Beatrix Demarest Lloyd, "The White Flier," and "The Thoroughbred," in 1908; "The Red Flag," in 1909; and "Tarantella," in 1910. So it is only fitting that now, at the height of her reputa-

tion, Miss MacVane should come back to AINSLEE's with what, in our judgment, is the most fascinating story she has yet written.

"Adventurous Violet," as Miss MacVane calls her alluring heroine, is a young American girl, who seeks to exchange a position for merely position. Generously equipped with about everything but money—tact, wit, buoyant spirits, adaptability, beauty, unlimited resourcefulness, and ambition—she breezes her way through a most delightful series of adventures to the realization of her prosperity and utmost happiness.

We will say nothing concerning coronets, historic old French châteaux, oil wells in unexpected places, romantic rescues, American millionaires, or titled heroes. You would rather hear the whole story from the vivacious heroine herself, told with her own imitable charm. You will find it complete in the coming number. And unless we are very much mistaken, you will have to make place in your affections for Edith MacVane's "Adventurous Violet" alongside those other irresistible AINSLEE's heroines, Marion Hill's *Georgette*, Charles Saxby's *Simone*, and Eleanor Hoyt Brainerd's *Pat*.



YOU will find the ten or a dozen short stories for February unusually well contrasted, which, as you know, we consider fully as important as that they should be individually entertaining. It is not enough that each story in a magazine should, within its limitations, be true to life. If the magazine, as a whole, is to be *real*, it must be as varied

as life itself—a little humor, a dash of pathos, and a deal of determination relieved in spots by bits of foolery. With this in mind, we consider the coming number of AINSLEE's an unusually successful one.

A story sure to arouse discussion is "The Tigress," by Ronald MacDonald, inspired, we imagine, by Kipling's lines, "The female of the species is more deadly than the male." Is a woman, when roused by danger to her offspring, capable of such depths of revengeful cruelty, even after the danger is past, as to cause her husband involuntarily to shrink from her in terror?

Another powerful tale is William Slavens McNutt's "Bill Heenan Pays," which would seem to bear out Tin Can Harris' contention that, financially at least, it's the man who always pays. With the possible exception of "Bill Heenan, Brute," in November AINSLEE's, this is the strongest of all McNutt's Alaskan series.

To offset these, you will have Frank Condon's delightfully fluffy tale of "The Lyre and the Lorelei," more of "The Romances of Sandy McGrab," starting in the present issue, and several appealing little stories which prove that, after all, pathos is only humor standing on its head.

Do you remember "The Pajama Man," a novelette, by Ralph Stock? Well, Mr. Stock contributes an entertaining yarn called "The Passing of Aunt Deborah" to the February number. We are no more able to classify it than we are to decide whether digging clams comes under the head of fishing or agriculture, but we do know that you'll like it.



A Woman's Story

FOR WOMEN——AND FOR MEN

“THE UNLIGHTED WAY”

By LEROY SCOTT

¶ *Which is the better way to bring up a girl—in ignorance, or with a full knowledge of herself and the world? That is just one of the vital questions Leroy Scott raises—and answers in the greatest novel he has ever written.*

¶ Leroy Scott has written a number of big books, but in this last story of his he has far outdone himself. It is the life story of a girl, primarily, and secondarily of a man. It is a vital, stirring, gripping narrative, startling in its dramatic effect and in the force with which its problems are brought home to the reader.

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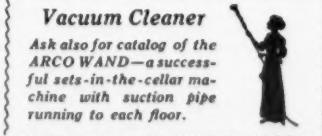
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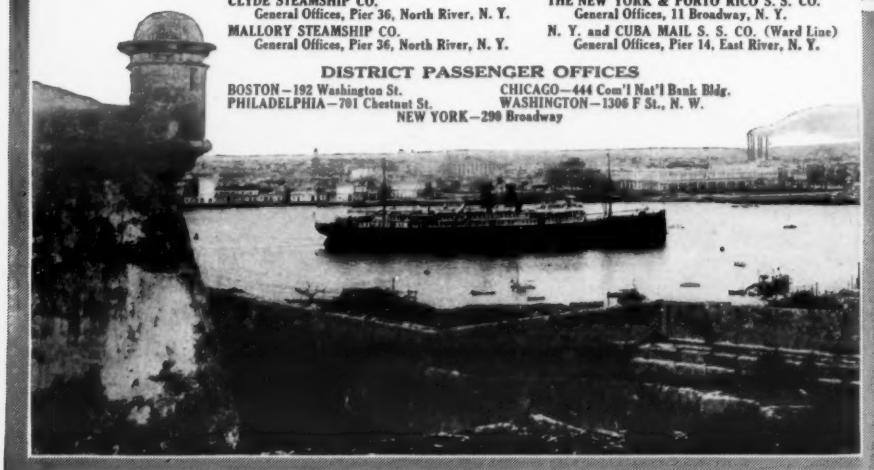
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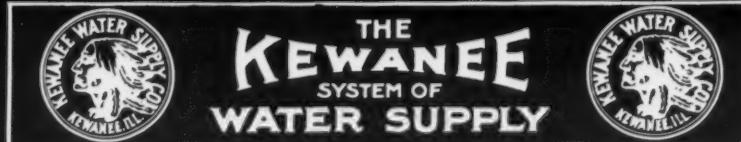


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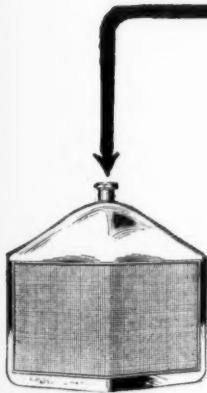
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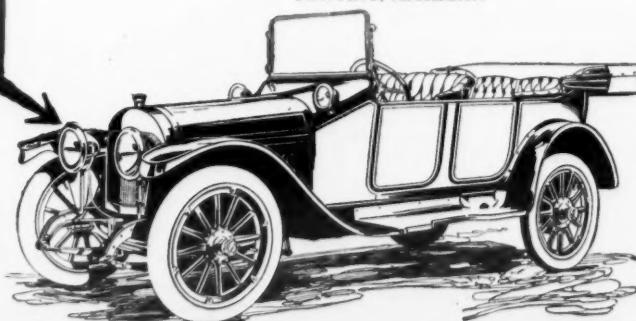
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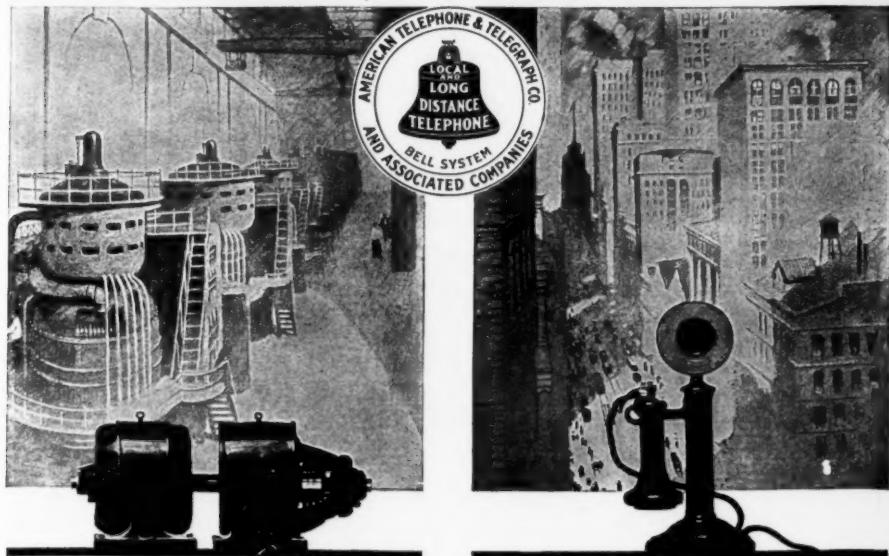
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is the only gum
I buy any way!"

"It's the only one I like. It's real springy chicle — it brightens my teeth, stimulates saliva and aids digestion. Then it's full of real mint leaf juice—delicious and beneficial with no aftertaste. But—

Be sure it's Wrigley's
Look for the spear"





Drunk On Coffee

About 15 centuries ago an Arab herder of goats driving the flock through some new country was alarmed at the antics of the animals and thought they were "possessed of the devil."

Each day the same thing occurred after the goats had eaten of a certain kind of berry. The goatherd thought he would eat a few to try the effect.

That was the discovery of coffee.

Arabs learned to brown the berries and boil them, drinking the liquor, which was then and now recognized to have a direct action on the heart, and of course the reaction and depression later on.

Coffee sets up a partial congestion of the liver; dulls the brain; wrecks the nerves, and interferes with digestion.

Anyone can easily prove whether it be coffee that causes the periodical headaches, sick stomach, bowel troubles, weak heart, kidney complaint, weak eyes, neuralgia, rheumatism or nervous prostration.

Simply leave it off entirely for ten days and have a rich, piping hot cup of **Postum**.

If you find, in a day or two, that you are getting better, that's your cue, follow it straight back to health, comfort and the power to do things.

Postum now comes in two forms:

Regular Postum — must be well boiled.

Instant Postum is a soluble powder. A spoonful dissolves in a cup of hot water, and with sugar and cream makes a delicious beverage *instantly*.

"There's a Reason" for POSTUM

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